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BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 14

THE DIAMOND LEGACY
or The Queen of
an Unknown Race



BY
CORNELIUS SHEA

"There, take this; it contains a fortune if you are made of the right stuff to get it," said Bony Larkins as he gave the boy a greasy-looking leather pocket-book.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

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THE DIAMOND LEGACY;

OR,

The Queen of an Unknown Race.

BY CORNELIUS SHEA.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE LEGACY.

It was a cold, stormy night in the month of November. Two boys were hurrying along a country road through the blinding rain just at the outskirts of the village of Mottfield.

Both were drenched to the skin, and the darkness was so intense that it was with great difficulty that they were able to keep in the roadway.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one of the boys, "I don't remember ever seeing it rain so hard before."

"Nor I, either, Frank," returned his companion, almost shouting, to make himself heard; "I'll be glad when I get home, or my name is not Sam Singleby."

The two boys had been to a meeting of a club.

Frank Lowe was an orphan, and worked for Sam Singleby's father, who owned a farm about four miles from the village.

Sam's mother was dead, and his father had married a second time, to a woman who did not treat the boy with more than motherly love.

On the whole, neither of the boys led very easy lives.

They had to get up at the break of day and work hard for a very poor recompense.

They were now within about a mile of their home, and were hurrying along with all possible speed.

Suddenly they heard a strange sound above the roaring of the elements.

Both boys came to a halt, and stood stock-still in their tracks. It sounded like a groan that they had heard.

At that hour of the night the sound startled them not a little.

Both listened intently.

Presently the noise was repeated.

Yes; it was unquestionably a groan that they heard.

It appeared to be very near them, too, for this time they heard it distinctly.

"There is somebody in distress, nearby, and I am going to see who it is," said Frank, as he made his way toward the ditch at the roadside.

Sam followed him.

Suddenly Frank stumbled and fell over something, landing upon his hands and knees in the soft mud in the ditch.

"Help me out of here," said a faint voice beneath him.

"Who are you? How came you here?" asked Frank, feeling about until his hands came upon a man's body.

"It's me—Bony Larkins. I had some sort of a fit, and fell here, and I can't help myself a bit. I suppose when the people at the village hear this they will say I am drunk again. But I don't care; let them talk; I'll soon be forgotten, anyway, for something tells me that the shadow of death is hanging over me. Help me up, whoever you are, and try and get me to my shanty."

The boys quickly recognized who the man was.

He was a strange character, called Bony Larkins, who had come to that place but a few months before.

He kept himself alone in the old shanty in the woods he had taken possession of, and had the reputation of getting drunk every time he went to the village.

He had never been known to speak a word to anybody, unless it was to the storekeeper where he purchased his meager supply of goods, consisting of groceries and rum, principally.

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Like the rest of the people in the neighborhood, Frank and Sam did not have much of an opinion of him, but they lifted the old drunkard out of the ditch as quickly as though he had been a near friend.

"Who are ye, anyway?" he asked, as they lifted him to his feet in the middle of the road.

Frank at once told him their names.

"Ah, yes; I have heard of ye. Now, jist git me to my shanty as quick as possible, or I'll die on the way. This is the fust favor I have asked of anybody since I have been in this place, and in all probability it will be the last one."

The man talked in such a strange tone of voice that the boys felt moved, and they hastened to assure him that he would be all right as soon as he got home.

"Never you mind, boys," said he. "You think I am drunk, but I am as sober as either of you are at this minute; I know what I am talking about, and something tells me that I am not long for this world. Well, never mind; I have seen a good deal of it, and I am satisfied. So heave ahead; my cable is running short, and I want to die in the forecastle of my ship."

His words now drifted into those of a seafaring man, and he brightened up as he finished speaking.

"Are you a sailor, Mr. Larkins?" asked Frank, as they hurried along as best they could over the narrow path through the woods which led to the old man's shanty.

"I have been, my boy, and something of an explorer, too, in my day. I tell you, it is many a strange sight that my eyes have seen, and many an adventure have I passed through, which, if I told to some folks, I would be called an old liar of the first water. But we won't talk about that now; we are putty nigh my old ship. Let me git there before I slip my cable, for that fit I had a spell ago wasn't for nothing. My legs are getting cold and numb now."

Bony Larkins' voice was very husky now, and it was with extreme difficulty that the two boys managed to drag him along.

The rain was still steadily falling, and it was as dark as pitch; but at length the shanty in the woods, which the old man called his ship, was reached.

The door was on the latch, and, pushing it open, the boys entered with their charge.

Sam struck a match and lighted a dirty-looking oil lamp on a rough wooden table, so they could see what they were doing.

A wretched-looking bunk was in one corner of the single apartment, and they gently deposited the old man on this.

As they did so, they saw that his face was a deathly white, while a strange, unnatural look shone from his eyes.

Frank and Sam now began to grow deeply alarmed.

Something told them that Bony Larkins' words were true, and that he really was going to die.

"Give me a swallow of that," gasped the sick man, pointing to the black bottle upon a shelf.

Frank hastened to obey.

The bottle contained whiskey, and it seemed to revive him a little.

"Now, boys, seeing that you have been kind enough to bring me home, an' that I am going to die soon, I mean to leave you all I am worth."

With much difficulty, he turned over, and drew a greasy-looking leather pocketbook from his breast pocket.

"There, take this; it contains a fortune, if you are made of the right stuff to get it. I have not a single relative in the world, and it is no more than right that some one who is a little deserving should have it."

Mechanically, Frank reached for the pocketbook, and took it in his hand.

The next instant Bony Larkins began breathing heavily, and fell back upon his bunk.

In ten minutes' time the two boys were in the presence of a corpse.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE POCKETBOOK CONTAINED.

For the space of five minutes the two boys gazed at each other in speechless dismay.

A feeling of horror came over them.

The sudden death of old Bony Larkins completely unmanned them for the time being.

They had not dreamed that the man was so near death's door when they helped him to his hut; but now he was dead, and they were in the presence of a corpse.

Frank Lowe was the first to speak.

"The man has evidently died of heart disease, Sam," said he. "I suppose it is our duty to notify the coroner, and tell him the facts of the case."

"You don't suppose we will get into any trouble by the man dying so suddenly, do you?" anxiously asked his companion.

"Trouble? No. Why should we? All that we can do is to state the case just exactly as it happened. But," he added, after a pause, "there is one thing that we must say nothing about."

"What is that?"

"The pocketbook—he gave it to us, you know; we will examine its contents to-morrow. It may be that it contains the means of making us both rich."

Sam Singleby shook his head.

"I don't think old Bony Larkins knew what he was talking about. In my mind, it contains nothing beyond a few dollars. But, at any rate, he gave it to us, so you keep it until we have time to see what is in it after this thing has been settled."

"Hadn't we better start at once and make a report of this?" asked Frank.

"Yes; come on."

Turning the light down low, they buttoned up their coats and left the hut, closing the door carefully behind them.

It was still raining hard, and, turning their faces toward the village, they struck out on a dog trot.

A constable lived just at the outskirts, and, on reaching his house, Frank rapped boldly on the door.

In a minute or two a window opened from above, and a man thrust his head out.

"What's wantin' at this hour o' ther night?"

The two boys told him what had happened as quickly as possible.

"What in thunder do I care if old Bony Larkins has turned up his toes?" demanded the constable, in an irritated voice. "He's better dead than alive—a good sight. What did he amount to, anyhow? You don't think I'm a-goin' to turn out of my bed on a night like this for him, do you? You boys git on home, now, as quick as you kin; it's time you were in bed three hours ago. I'll notify the coroner in the mornin', and the case will be 'tended to. Git, now, an' don't bother me no more to-night!"

"Well," said Sam, as the window was closed with a bang, "it's off our hands, anyhow; I guess we had better take the constable's advice and go home."

"That's so," assented his companion; and, turning their steps, they soon reached the house of Farmer Singleby.

They climbed upon the shed, and let themselves in at the win-

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dow as noiselessly as possible, and in a few minutes were in bed.

They were not allowed by the farmer's wife to have a light in the room, or they would have examined the pocketbook's contents then and there.

But they concluded that next morning would do as well, and after talking on the subject for a long while they fell asleep.

The two boys slept on soundly, and did not awaken until Sam's father routed them out to feed the cows, about half-past four in the morning.

There are lots of little chores to be done on a farm before breakfast, and our two young friends were kept so busily engaged that they scarcely had time to think of what had happened the night before.

At length, when they were going to the house to get their breakfast, about half an hour after daylight, they were suddenly recalled to it.

They beheld a crowd of men and boys, among whom was the coroner, making their way along the country road in the direction of Bony Larkins' hut.

In a moment they became infused with the excitement of the event of the night before, and, forgetting all about their breakfast, they jumped over the rail fence and started along with the crowd.

The coroner at once proceeded to question them, and, as they told a perfectly straight story, the matter was ended, as far as they were concerned.

At length the greatest part of the excitement was over.

The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "death from heart disease," and the body was carted off to the undertaker's.

Frank and Sam started homeward, with the rest of the crowd, answering all sorts of questions that were put to them by the inquisitive ones, in the best manner possible.

They entered the house, and received a severe scolding from Mrs. Singleby for going off without their breakfast.

"Well, never mind now," said she, angrily; "the table is cleared off, an' not a mouthful do either of ye git till dinner time! I never seed sich cuttin' up in all my born days. Go on an' 'tend to yer work now, an' show that ye kin earn the victuals an' clothes ye git!"

Poor boys!

They were really very hungry, as the keen air of the November morning had sharpened their appetites.

But there was no use in stopping to argue the question.

Mrs. Singleby was the boss of that house, and what she said was law.

Her husband gently expostulated, and then his better half flew in a terrible rage, and told him to "git out of ther house, too, an' not to show up till dinner time."

Without saying a word, Frank and Sam put on their hats and went out in the barnyard.

"I am getting tired of this kind of living!" said Sam, hotly. "If it wasn't for father, I believe I would run away from home."

"I think I shall leave, anyway," replied Frank.

"Perhaps you are right," returned his companion. "But let us see what is in this pocketbook before we begin to worry. What do you say if we go to the hut where Bony Larkins lived and examine it? It isn't at all likely that we would be disturbed there."

Sam at once agreed to this, and half an hour later they had reached the hut, and closed and locked its single door.

Making sure that there was no one in the vicinity of the hut, the boys sat down at the rickety table, and Frank produced the pocketbook, and emptied its contents before them.

A folded sheet of foolscap paper, a flat piece of ivory, with a square hole through the center, and an oblong piece of some dark substance, about the size of a rifle cartridge—that was all it contained.

The first thing Frank did was to unfold the sheet of foolscap. It was filled with writing in a cramped hand.

Eagerly the two boys perused the following:

"To WHOEVER FINDS THIS: I, Napoleon Bonaparte Larkins, do truthfully affirm that I landed on the eastern coast of Africa, near the mouth of Lufiji River, on the nineteenth of December, 1888. Being fond of adventure, and being possessed of a very hardy nature, I organized an exploring party of three white sailors and eleven black natives, and set out inland, fully equipped for the journey.

"After many days' travel over poisonous marshes and across arid plains, I arrived at the foot of a towering range of mountains with but four followers at my back.

"I had been just a month on my trip when I arrived at the mountains, and I determined to cross them and see what lay beyond.

"Well, to make a long story short, I crossed the snow tops of the mountains and descended to the other side with my four followers.

"Now comes the strangest part of my story.

"I had reached a region of country that was absolutely unknown to the world at large!

"It was the most beautiful country I had ever set eyes upon, and it was inhabited by a strange race of people, who did not correspond in manner or looks with any other known race upon the face of the globe.

"We were given to understand, when the natives first caught us, that we would not be harmed in the least, but that we must never undertake to escape from the place, as all who came to that country must make it their home as long as they lived.

"Of course, we agreed to this, and for four years we lived in the strange country, learning all about the unknown race and their habits.

"Precious stones were there in abundance, and almost every woman and child in the place wore necklaces and ornaments which would have brought princely fortunes.

"My black follower, whose name was Zeika, by the way, seemed to be perfectly contented with his lot, but we white men began to chafe, and longed to reach the civilized world once more.

"We planned our escape, and one night, when the entire place was wrapped in slumber, we gathered all the jewels we could carry and started to cross the snow-topped mountains.

"But I was the only one who succeeded in doing it—the other three being captured and slaughtered on the spot—and about a month later I reached the coast, a veritable living skeleton.

"But I was worth a fortune, though, and, after reaching civilization, I began to pick up my lost strength.

"I determined that the rest of my life should be one of pleasure and ease, and so soon became a fast man of the period. But drink ruined me, and now, beyond the money I have laid away as the property of one who finds this—and I hope he will use it to fit himself out to make a journey to that unknown land—I have barely nothing.

"If the one in whose hands this may fall is brave enough, let him undertake the task of going over the ground I have been over; and, if he does so, and succeeds in reaching civilization again, I will guarantee that he will feel himself well paid."

Then followed a minute description of the exact route to

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take to reach the unknown country, winding up with the following postscript:

"The piece of ivory in the pocketbook is one which I brought from that country, and is considered of more value than gold or diamonds there. If you open the small black object, you also find, a diamond will be disclosed. This belongs to the queen's crown, and I would like it to be given back to her, in case you—whoever it may be—ever reach the place, as I stole it before I left."

There were still a few more lines of writing on the extreme edge of the paper, which looked as though it had been written at a more recent date.

It read this way:

"Dig two feet beneath the stone slab at the door, and you will find an iron box. In this is enough money to purchase an outfit to reach the unknown race, and more beside.

"NAPOLEON BONAPARTE LARKINS."

It was fully five minutes before either of the boys spoke after reading the contents of the sheet of foolscap paper.

"Well, what do you think of it?" finally asked Sam.

"It is just this way with me," replied Frank, "if we really find the money beneath the stone slab, and there is a diamond in that piece of gutta-percha, or whatever it may be, I believe the whole story!"

"And otherwise?"

"I think it is a farce!"

"Well, old fellow, that's just my opinion exactly. We will open this."

He picked up the object resembling a rifle cartridge, and, giving it two or three turns, it came apart, and a large-sized diamond, of the most extraordinary brilliancy, fell out upon the table!

CHAPTER III.

OFF FOR AFRICA.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank Lowe, "there is the diamond, sure enough!"

"Isn't it a beauty, too!" quickly replied Sam. "Now we must look and see if the money is under the stone slab."

"There is a shovel yonder in the corner; we may as well see the rest of this adventure out."

Frank seized the article in question, and, opening the door, he was soon engaged in digging down by the side of the slab.

In a few minutes he was able to pry it over, and then he struck in upon the soft, yielding soil with a vim.

Just as he had dug down about two feet, the shovel struck something hard, which sent forth a metallic ring.

A minute more, and he stooped down and drew something from the hole.

Both boys gave a suppressed cry of joy.

It was the iron box!

"Take it inside," said Frank; "I am going to fill up the hole again, and place the slab exactly like it was."

This task was soon finished, and then they proceeded to examine the box.

It was not over six inches square, and the lid came off readily enough.

A wrapping of oiled silk met their gaze.

"I don't think we are going to be fooled," remarked Frank; "and, if we are, we may as well know it at once."

Turning the box over, he dumped its contents on the table without further ceremony.

Then it was that both uttered an exultant cry.

A double handful of golden coins clinked upon the table, rolling in every direction, and some falling upon the floor.

Without stopping to pick them up, Frank unrolled the piece of oiled silk, which was wrapped around a small package; and, when he had succeeded in doing so, a roll of bank notes was disclosed.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Sam Singleby. "I believe every word of Bony Larkins' statement to be true."

"So do I," chimed in his companion. "Let's count this money and see how much there is."

It did not take them a great while to do this, since the bills were nearly all hundreds, and the gold was in twenty-dollar pieces.

"Three thousand eight hundred and sixty dollars," said Frank. "That is more money than either of us ever saw before at one time. I can scarcely believe that it belongs to us."

"Phew!" whistled Sam. "I guess we needn't ask any odds of my stepmother now. Why, Frank, we're rich!"

"Not exactly," replied his companion. "But we may be if we follow the instructions written on that sheet of paper."

"You intend to start for Africa, then?"

"Of course; don't you?"

"Certainly! You shall be leader, and whatever you say we will do."

"Well, seeing that Bony Larkins provided this money for the express purpose of some one going in search of the unknown race, I think we ought to go."

"So do I; we will start as soon as possible. We will go and bid my father good-by, and then set out for New York."

Gathering up the money, they stowed it carefully in their pockets, along with the pocketbook containing the diamond and the piece of ivory.

Farmer Singleby was at work in the barnyard, and when he saw the two boys hurrying toward him he gazed at them in no little surprise.

But, when they told him they were about to start on a long journey, he was almost staggered.

But he made little or no objections. He seemed to be favorably impressed with the idea of his son striking out for himself; and, besides, he no doubt thought that he would get along a little better with his wife in case such an event happened.

"Go on, boys, if ye think ye kin do well," said he; "ye will never be wuth nothin' as long as yer stay here on ther farm—that's sartain."

There was a hearty hand-shaking, and the boys departed from the old farm with tears in their eyes.

In the village they learned that more than sufficient money to pay for his burial had been found on the person of Bony Larkins, and so they felt easy on that score, and took the evening train for the city of New York.

* * * * *

Six weeks later we find Frank Lowe and Sam Singleby on the deck of a vessel in the Indian Ocean, bound for Bagamayo, Zanzibar, on the African coast.

Frank is speaking.

"Sam," said he, "I don't like that dark-featured man standing by the rail over there. He has been watching us ever since we left Suez, and he seems to be aware that we are on some particular errand, and have considerable money about us. It was only yesterday that I caught him tampering with our baggage, and, when I asked him what he was looking for, he apologized, and said he had made a mistake."

"I, too, have noticed queer things about him," returned Sam. "He is a Frenchman, and is known as Jaques Lecairo."

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"Well, it won't do any harm for us to keep a watch on him, anyhow. Keep your eyes and ears open."

At Suez the boys had picked up a young Englishman, who was stranded in a strange place, without a penny in his pocket.

He was a good-natured fellow, as strong as an ox, and one who was not likely to forget a favor.

Frank questioned him, and found that his name was Oliver Looney, and it struck him then and there that he would be just the person to accompany them on their quest for the unknown race.

The Englishman jumped at an offer made by the boys, and said "he would stick to 'em has long has there was hanythink left of 'em to stick to."

He had not been in the services of Frank and Sam two days before they were satisfied that he was just the fellow they wanted, so he was at once put in charge of their baggage, which contained many valuable things in the way of outfits, etc., suitable for traveling through the country they hoped to penetrate.

It seems that the fears of the two boys in regard to the suspicious-looking Frenchman were not altogether groundless.

One night, when the vessel had almost reached her port, a dark figure glided to the door of the stateroom occupied by Frank and Sam. It was Jaques Lecairo.

In a moment he had noiselessly unlocked the door, by means of skeleton keys, and entered the room.

He carried a revolver in one hand and a handkerchief saturated with chloroform in the other.

Both boys were sleeping soundly, and in a minute's time he had placed the handkerchief to Sam Singleby's nostrils, and rendered him unconscious.

But just as he turned to the other berth, Frank awoke.

He gave a low cry of astonishment as he beheld the Frenchman standing over him with leveled revolver, and reached for his own weapon beneath his pillow.

"Stop!" hissed the Frenchman. "Make another move, and you die!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE AFRICAN WILDS.

"Make another move, and you die!"

As Jaques Lecairo uttered these words, Frank Lowe came to his full senses.

With a coolness that seemed almost impossible under the existing circumstances, the boy gazed at the Frenchman, and said:

"If you have any business with me, out with it at once!"

The villain was staggered for a moment, and knew not what sort of a reply to make. But he kept his revolver leveled at the boy's head, and seemed to be striving to think of something to say.

He had no intention whatever of doing the boys any bodily harm. He had overheard a bit of conversation between them several days before, and, from what he had caught, he judged that they were bound to some spot where gold and diamonds could be found in a plenteous supply. He heard them talk of a paper they had in their possession describing the place, and also of the diamond that had come from there, and, taking this in, the villain had long been waiting for an opportunity to steal the paper from them, as well as what money they had, without being discovered as the thief.

But now his plan was frustrated; he had succeeded in chloro-forming one of the boys, but the other was wide awake, looking directly at him.

Jaques Lecairo thought the best thing he could do now was to

get Frank Lowe to promise to say nothing about his midnight visit, and then leave, and wait for a more fitting opportunity.

Holding the revolver still pointed at the boy's head, he said:

"If you will promise to say nothing about this until after we arrive in port, I'll leave at once, and won't bother you again."

"And if I refuse—what then?" asked Frank, coolly.

"I'll kill you!" hissed the Frenchman, beginning to get in a passion.

"No, you won't!"

"I will kill you, I say, if you—"

At that moment a startling incident occurred.

The figure of a man suddenly sprang upon the Frenchman and sent him reeling to the floor with a blow from a short club.

"Take that, yer willain! Hi know ther reason why yer come haround sneaking hin gentlemen's rooms!"

Frank uttered a joyous exclamation, and sprang from his berth.

It was Oliver Looney who had made the timely interference, and he now stood over the prostrate form of Jaques Lecairo in a threatening attitude.

He had been awakened by a bad dream, and, being of a rather superstitious nature, had crawled from his berth, with the thought that all was not well with his two young employers.

He made his way silently to the door of their stateroom, and, seeing that it was ajar, pushed it open and softly entered.

A dim light was burning, and the plucky Englishman took in the situation at a glance.

How well he improved his opportunity is already known.

"Bravo, Oliver! You were just in time," said Frank.

"Right yer are, sir," was the reply. "Get out of here, yer bloomin' duffer!"

And he kicked the fallen villain back upon the floor just as he was in the act of rising.

But Jaques Lecairo was no coward, whatever else he might have been, and, making a sudden movement, he sprang to his feet, and drew a gleaming knife from beneath his coat.

Spat!

A well-directed blow from Oliver's fist sent him back into his former position.

"Don't yer think Hi 'ad better throw 'im hup hon ther deck, hand let 'im go?" said Oliver. "Hi don't think he will bother hus hagain."

"Go ahead; I am agreeable."

Without any farther ado, he picked the man up as easily as if he had been an infant, and fired him out in grand style.

It was just about this time that Sam came to from the effects of the chloroform, but he was too dizzy to comprehend what was going on.

The smell of the powerful drug was still very strong in the stateroom, and, taking the boy by the arms, Frank and Oliver led him outside and up on deck.

The air was cool and bracing, and it soon had the effect of reviving Sam to the full extent of his faculties again.

The Frenchman was nowhere to be seen, and they concluded that he must have been satisfied with the rough handling he had received and slunk off to his stateroom.

Nor did he get in their way during the rest of the voyage, and when the vessel arrived at Bagamayo he sneaked ashore as quickly as possible, and made himself scarce.

The boys tarried a couple of days in Bagamayo, during which time they purchased a yoke of oxen and a strong cart, and secured the services of a reputable guide to lead them through the unknown wilderness they hoped to traverse.

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He was a giant black, of fine proportion, and agreed to conduct them as far as the marsh lands for a nominal sum.

When Bolo—that was the black's name—learned that they intended to penetrate the swamps, he insisted that they should purchase a light canoe.

He also predicted that if they stuck to their determination they would never return.

He was a Zulu, and was very eloquent in picturing to the boys the horrors of the "Death Lands," as he called the marsh district.

But Frank and Sam laughed, and Oliver Looney grinned, by way of accompaniment, whenever the Zulu talked in this strain.

"Never mind," said he; "wait and see. My white brothers will wish they had taken the advice of Bolo—many times before a hundred days have come and gone."

Frank did not take much stock in what Bolo said, but he acted on his advice in regard to the procuring of a canoe, and placing it on the cart with the rest of their outfit, and left Bagamayo on the morning of the second day of their arrival in port.

They struck out in a southwesterly direction, and it was not very long ere the little town was lost behind them.

The sun was scorching hot, and the boys felt anything but comfortable. Oliver said it reminded him of a baker's oven in London, and swore that they would not need a fire to do their cooking while in that region.

The farther they traversed, the wilder the appearance of the country became, and on the evening of the fourth day they had arrived at a spot which appeared as though the foot of man had never trod it before.

But Bolo assured them that he had been there several times before, and that it would be two days before they would reach the beginning of the "Death Lands."

"You won't go any farther with us after we reach them, then?" asked Frank, as they went into camp for the night.

"No," replied the Zulu; "too many went there before and never came back."

Suddenly a thought struck Frank.

"How old are you, Bolo?" asked he.

"Pretty near forty, my brother," was the reply. "Why do you want to know?"

"Did you ever know a black guide by the name of Zeika a long while ago?"

The Zulu started, and gave the boy a look of searching inquiry.

"Yes, brother," he slowly answered. "I knew him well; he was my father. He led some white men into the 'Death Lands,' and none of them ever came back. Why does my brother ask of Zeika? Where did he ever hear of him?"

"I will tell you what I know of him presently. You say none of them ever came back; I say one of them did."

In a moment the Zulu was all attention, and almost fiercely told Frank to tell what he had to say.

In as few words as possible, the boy related what was written upon the manuscript in his possession, and showed him the diamond and the piece of ivory.

"There, Bolo," said he, in conclusion; "now you know the reason we came to this wild country. What do you say now? Do you believe the story?"

For a moment Bolo remained in silence.

At length, rising to his feet, he said:

"Wait until to-morrow, my brother, and Bolo will tell you what he thinks about it."

The two had been seated upon a mossy rock, a few yards from

the camp-fire, which now burned up brightly in the gathering darkness, and, as the Zulu ceased speaking, they were startled by hearing a low, mocking laugh from the bush behind them.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE DEATH LANDS.

"Brother, that was the laugh of a white man," said Bolo, after he had listened for a moment for the sound to be repeated.

"You are right!" exclaimed Frank, drawing his revolver and springing toward the bush.

As he did so, the mocking laugh was repeated, and then a crashing in the undergrowth was heard, showing that the author of it was endeavoring to make his escape.

Hastily telling Sam and Oliver to guard the camp, the boy started in pursuit, followed by the Zulu.

In a moment they were in the midst of a tangled maze, and before they succeeded in breaking from it the noise made by the one who had been spying upon them had completely died out.

It was too dark to attempt to find the trail, so, not a little crestfallen, they returned to the camp.

"What was the matter, anyhow?" asked Sam, as soon as they got back.

"Some one prying into our business—that's all," replied Frank. "Natives?"

"No; it was a white man—that I am sure of."

"I'll bet five dollars it was the Frenchman, then."

"Hi wouldn't be ha bit surprised hif hit was ther blawsted cove," put in the Englishman.

Bolo shrugged his shoulders.

"My brothers had best not to wonder so much as to who it was. They had better draw in the oxen and prepare the camp for an attack. If they have enemies following them, we must be prepared for them, or we will all perish before we reach the 'Death Lands.'"

"Bolo is right," said Frank. "I have not the least doubt that it is Jaques Lecairo who is following. He has got wind of our errand in some manner, and is bent on finding a rich treasure, or something of the sort. We will fix up our camp, and keep on the watch for a surprise, for beyond a doubt he has some one with him."

Being on their guard now, the boys at once began to make what little preparations they could.

The cart was rolled over to the face of a steep bank, within a few feet of a river, which, the Zulu said, was the Lufiji, and the oxen were driven in and hobbled close by it.

They divided themselves in watches, and prepared to await developments.

But the long night wore on, and at length the morning came, bathed in a bank of mist, which arose from the ground like a cloud of steam.

Not the least noise had been heard beyond the usual sounds of prowling animals and the cries of night birds, common in such regions.

Preparations to continue the journey were at once begun.

After a hearty breakfast had been eaten, the oxen were hitched to the cart and the party struck out, following the course of the river, with Frank and the Zulu at its head.

Oliver Looney drove the oxen and Sam brought up the rear, occasionally glancing behind, to make sure that they would not receive a surprise from that direction.

When they had traversed a mile or two, it suddenly occurred to Frank to ask Bolo if he had come to any conclusion in regard to the story he had told him the night before.

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The boy at once broached the subject.

The Zulu remained in silence for a moment, and then said:

"Brother, I believe what the white sailor wrote down on the paper is true; I will go with you to the unknown land. If anybody else could reach it, we can. Enough; we will succeed, or we will all die together in the Death Lands."

After this declaration, the Zulu remained quiet for a long time, only replying to the boy's questions by nodding his head.

Just about the time specified by the guide, they arrived at the commencement of the marsh district.

They had not come across a single human being, but numerous footprints had been discovered at one particular point, showing that there were natives about the vicinity.

It was about noon when Bolo ordered them to come to a halt.

"Now, my brothers," said he, addressing them, "we have come as far as we can with the oxen and cart; our path now is a dangerous one. We must slaughter the animals—or one of them, at least—and salt the best of the meat for use on our journey. There may be plenty of food to be got in the Death Lands, but we must make sure that we won't starve before we cross them. What do my white brothers say? Shall I proceed with the task?"

The boys nodded their willingness. They could do naught else than bow to the Zulu's superior judgment; and, besides, it would be utterly impossible to drive the oxen over the treacherous quicksands of the horrible swamp.

By the time darkness had set in, Bolo had slaughtered one of the oxen and turned the other one loose, and the animal at once started on the back track.

He fixed the meat he had selected in a manner according to his own idea, and then the party prepared to pass another night before they ventured to brave the dangers of the swamp.

The next morning, after breakfast, dividing the meat and outfit into four packages, they bade farewell to their cart, and, picking up the light canoe, they boldly entered the realms of the swamp lands.

They picked their way over the treacherous ground for fully an hour before they came to any real signs of a body of water, and then a narrow, black-looking stream showed up, which led to a dreary-appearing lake of broad expanse.

"Whew!" exclaimed Oliver; "hif that hain't ther wust-looking lot o' water Hi've seened hin my whole life, vy, then, Hi don't know vot Hi'm talking habout."

The Englishman had scarcely ceased speaking, when a floundering was heard, and the next moment the head of an enormous crocodile arose from the surface of the stream, and made a vicious snap at them.

Oliver gave a yell of dismay, and endeavored to jump back, but his feet went from under him on the slippery ground, and he fell downward, like a shot, into the water, within a few feet of the crocodile's open jaws.

Almost at the same instant a rifle shot rang out, and, clutching his head wildly, Frank staggered for a moment, and then fell at the Zulu's feet.

CHAPTER VI.

JAQUES LECAIRO AT WORK.

It will be in order for us to follow up Jaques Lecairo a little, and find out what the wily scoundrel was bent upon.

As soon as he sneaked from the ship, on her arrival at Bagamayo, he changed the style of his wearing apparel, and donned a heavy false beard, thus effectually disguising himself.

He followed the two boys and their English servant about, and

took note of everything they did during their stay in the town; and, when they engaged the services of a black guide, he set about doing the same.

The Frenchman seemed to have plenty of money at his command, and he had no difficulty in hiring an ugly, scar-faced man, who was an enemy of Bolo, and as much of a villain as Lecairo was himself.

"Birds of a feather flock together," is an old saying, and, when the Frenchman told the black what he wanted of him, they soon came to an agreement.

"I want to follow those boys, and get a certain paper they have in their possession," said Jaques Lecairo. "You can have what booty they have got for yourself, besides the money I am going to pay you for your services. At the same time, you will be able to get square on the Zulu guide, who, you say, you have got a grudge against. If we can't surprise them, and get the best of them, we must follow them as far as they go, even if it be to the very heart of the continent."

The black, whose name was Wampi, nodded his head.

"All right," returned he, in broken English, "I will stay by you as long as you stay by me. Enough!"

"There is lots of money in this," went on the Frenchman, "and, if we succeed, we will both be rich before many weeks."

When our friends struck out on their journey, they were followed at a safe distance by the Frenchman and his hired tool.

It really was Jaques Lecairo who had uttered the mocking laugh when Frank Lowe and Bolo had been engaged in conversation near their camp.

But he was a wily villain, and managed to climb a tree and elude them easily enough; and, when they gave up the hunt for him, he crawled down and made his way back to his camp, which was about a mile from the spot.

Lecairo had heard every word that had passed between Frank and the Zulu, and, becoming so much elated over the discovery as to the real errand they had in those wild parts, he had uttered the mocking laugh without hardly knowing it.

When he told Wampi where the party they were following were bound for, the black shrugged his shoulders, but said he would go where Bolo went.

"Good, Wampi!" said the Frenchman. "We will see the end of this adventure together. We must contrive to pick off our enemies, one by one, for it will never do for us to attempt to attack them openly. Come on; if what you say is correct, the swamp is not far away. We ought to be able to reach it before night sets in."

The villain set out upon the trail of the searchers for the unknown race, followed by the rascally guide.

A little before sundown, they observed a column of smoke rising above the treetops, and then they came to a halt.

As soon as darkness set in, they crawled stealthily up.

When the little party had got well into the swamp, the Frenchman and his ally, who were not far behind them, climbed a tree, to take in their surroundings.

Lecairo saw the ones he was looking for almost at the first glance, and, as Oliver Looney slipped and fell almost into the very jaws of the crocodile, he leveled his rifle at Frank Lowe and pulled the trigger.

The recoil caused by the discharge of his weapon had the effect of disturbing his equilibrium, and before the villain had a chance to see the effect of his shot he lost his balance in the top of the tree and went crashing downward toward a pool of stagnant water below.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE SWAMP DENIZENS.

For a moment Sam Singleby and the Zulu were rendered speechless by the two startling events that had just occurred.

But before either of them could utter a word or make a move, Frank, who had fallen to the ground apparently lifeless, sprang to his feet, and, seizing the Englishman by the hand, drew him out of the water just as the crocodile made a vicious snap at him.

For a wonder, the horrible reptile did not attempt to crawl upon the bank, but, after glaring at the party for a while, paddled away and disappeared behind a clump of thick reeds.

"Now, then," said Frank, coolly, as he jerked Oliver to his feet, "I would like to know who fired that shot which so nearly came putting an end to me."

The bullet had grazed the side of his cheek, leaving a brown streak, which now felt as though he had been singed with a red-hot iron.

They had all been too much occupied with Oliver Looney's accident to note which way the rifle shot came from.

"Blawst me!" exclaimed the Englishman; "hit seems that some other bloomin' duffers besides crocket-tiles har ha-botherin' hus!"

"Yes," rejoined Bolo; "bad white man fire that shot which came so near killing my brave young brother. We must look sharp for him, and if we lay eyes on him he must die; that is the only way to make ourselves safe. There is enough danger in the Death Lands to come upon us without having a bad man trying to shoot us."

"You are right," said Sam. "We have got to be very careful. Let us hunt about and see if we can find some traces of Jaques Lecairo."

They did look about, and presently they came across the footprints made by the Frenchman and his accomplice.

It did not take Bolo five minutes to find out that they were only two who were following them—"a white man and a black," he said.

But while they discovered the footprints easy enough, it was impossible to find the ones who made them, and after an hour's diligent search they gave it up and made their way to the edge of the broad lake!

"Now," remarked Frank, "according to Bony Larkins' directions, the journey he made was by way of the left shore of this body of water. But as we have a canoe we will go directly across it, and thus cut off two or three days' dangerous traveling through the intricate paths of the marsh. We may as well launch the canoe at once; it is fully capable of holding us and all our belongings."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Sam, lifting up one end of the light craft. "Catch hold, Oliver, and we will set her in the water."

In ten minutes' time the launch had been successfully accomplished, and putting their belongings in the canoe, the four stepped in and took their places; then they pushed off, and began paddling toward the center of the black-looking body of water.

The boys laid their course by compass, in accordance with the rough chart of the swamp they had in their possession, but when night came they saw that Bony Larkins had made a mistake in his drawing, or else the swamp had been submerged since he had traversed it; for there seemed to be no end of it yet.

A lantern was lighted, and placed in the bow of the canoe, and they kept on their way all night, relieving each other alternately with the paddles.

When it began to light up a little so they could see what they

were about, they observed that their traveling with the canoe was about done.

The swamp now was one vast area of little pools, patches of comparatively solid ground and numerous quicksands.

Pushing the canoe toward a high and dry spot, which loomed up before them like an oasis in the desert, Frank said:

"Here is a good place to land; we will see about getting breakfast on terra firma."

In a few moments they made a landing, and Sam collected some dry twigs and started a fire.

The Zulu proceeded to take some of the salted meat, and soon a very appetizing odor began to pervade the dank, noisome place.

It not only caused our four friends to grow very hungry, but other creatures as well.

Just as they were about to sit down and partake of their meal, a sort of barking yelp was heard, which was presently answered by like sounds from every point, it seemed.

"Vot his ter matter now?" queried Oliver. "Hit sounds has though ha lot hof bloomin' dogs 'as been let loose!"

All hands listened in astonishment, and presently they heard a pattering sound like the rush of many feet.

Instinctively they grasped their rifles and strove to pierce the gloomy depths of the swamp.

Their suspense was not of long duration, for presently a score or more of creatures resembling hideous baboons made their appearance from all sides.

They were as large as men, and resembled the human race far more than any creature Frank or Sam had ever seen or read of.

But what seemed most strange to the party was the fact that they ran over the quicksands with as much ease as though they were upon solid ground.

The mystery of this was soon explained, however, for as they drew nearer, the intruders of the swamp saw that the horrible-looking creatures possessed immense web-feet, which spread out to alarming proportions when the occasion demanded it, and shut up accordingly.

They possessed faces exactly like that of a Congo negro, and nearly all wore a short curly beard.

The rest of their bodies was covered with a thin growth of hair, and their legs, which were very long, were shaped like those of a trained athlete.

Each one of the creatures carried a huge knotty club, and when they arrived to within fifty feet of the four, they halted and formed a circle about them, keeping up their dog-like cries meanwhile.

"My brothers," said Bolo, with a faltering voice, "we will have to kill some of these strange people of the Death Lands, or they will kill us!"

And he leveled his rifle and pulled the trigger.
Crack!

The report rang out sharply, causing innumerable echoes, and one of the denizens of the swamp threw up its arms and fell headforemost in the quicksand, where it gradually began to sink from sight.

For a moment the creature's companions gazed in terrified silence at its sinking form, and then they uttered a long-drawn howl of dismay, and glared fiercely at the intruders.

"We are in for it now," said Frank. "Stand together, boys, and we may be able to drive them away."

Seizing their clubs, the now furious inhabitants of the swamp made a savage rush at the little party.

The next instant four Winchester rifles began speaking in rapid succession, and the rush was checked.

The strange animals seemed bewildered at the result of the

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galling fire, and seeing their forces dropping all around them, they uttered a combined shriek of terror and fled from the spot like the wind.

"Very good," remarked Sam Singleby, breathing a sigh of relief, "I'll bet they won't bother us very soon again."

"No, my brother, they will not," said the Zulu, solemnly; "we can proceed with our breakfast, and then be off on our journey."

Sam was right. They did not see the least sign of another of the curious, baboon-like animals during the rest of the journey through the treacherous swamp.

CHAPTER VIII.

OVER THE MOUNTAIN.

Three weeks from the time our friends entered the horrible swamp we find them safely out of it on the other side.

But how changed!

Their food gave out almost a week before they emerged upon high and dry ground, and they suffered untold misery in their efforts to leave the detested place behind them.

They had nearly perished on several different occasions. It was with great difficulty that they kept themselves from being sucked down into the quicksands; Oliver Looney had been attacked with fever; Bolo had broken his arm by falling from a tree. While on the verge of starvation they had been attacked by a number of vampire bats while they slept; but after outliving all these, and many more dangers, they gave a cry of feeble joy and their pale, emaciated faces brightened when they saw that they had struck the beginning of the uplands.

It was now two days since they had crossed the "Death Lands," and they had pitched their camp about five miles beyond their limit, to rest and recuperate their lost strength.

Game was plentiful, and as they had an abundant supply of ammunition, all thoughts of starving for the present were thrown aside.

"I think," said Frank Lowe, as he turned a pheasant he was roasting over a fire, "that we had better remain just where we are for a few days. Bolo's arm will be better then, and we will all feel more like climbing those mountains over there. That range tallies exactly with the description written out by Bony Larkins, and I am firmly convinced that when we cross them we will find the unknown race."

"I agree with you, brother," returned the Zulu, quietly. "All that you told me has come true thus far. I shall find my father there, too, depend upon it."

"I wonder what sort of people this unknown race is?" remarked Sam. "Bony Larkins did not say, you know. He only wrote that they were unlike anything he had ever seen or heard of. I am getting anxious to see them; for, I suppose, when we meet them all our former adventures will be eclipsed!"

"We can only wait, my brothers," said Bolo. "My broken arm is knitting so fast that it will not be long now before we shall be able to cross the mountains."

The mountains in question were about five miles away to the southwest, and some of their peaks reared up to such a towering height that they seemed to be lost in the clouds.

The party rested six days longer in the spot, and under the healthful influence of the pure air and the plenteous supply of fresh meat they became stout and hardy again.

They now concluded that it was time for them to climb the mountains and see what the other side had in store for them.

During the time they had remained in camp they had, at the suggestion of the Zulu, constructed four rude-looking robes from the skins of the different animals they had slain.

They would need these, he said, before they crossed the mountains, and as all hands could plainly observe the snow-covered peaks, they did not doubt his word.

It was scorching hot where they now were, but a day or two would make a big change.

It was about two hours past noon when they reached the base of the mountains, and after resting a brief spell they threw their blankets and as much meat as they could well carry over their shoulders, and started on their long and tortuous climb.

Everything comes to an end, sooner or later, and this remarkable journey was no exception.

One day about noon they stood upon a level piece of rock, gazing into the most beautiful valley they had ever set eyes on.

They had crossed the snow-capped mountains after innumerable difficulties and sufferings, and made half the descent on the other side. They were well-nigh played out from the effects of their long journey, and now as they surveyed the beautiful scene before them, it presented such an inviting aspect that they regarded it as a veritable haven of rest.

This was the first real good sight they had had of the valley, and as they gazed at it in silent admiration, they shook each other by the hand, and then sat down, as if they had but just finished a hard day's work and had been very well paid for it.

But even as they sat there enjoying the extreme stillness and beauty of the scene, they detected a footfall behind them.

Their spell of enchantment was broken.

Turning quickly, they beheld the figure of a man, literally clad in rags, tottering slowly toward them.

A cry of astonishment went up from all hands.

It was Jaques Lecairo, the Frenchman, whom they saw.

But he was a pitiful looking object, indeed.

His long tramp upon their trail had worn him down to a mere skeleton, and it was all that he could do to stagger up to them.

"Don't turn me away," he exclaimed, hoarsely. "I have followed your trail until I have found you; give me some medicine, I beg of you! I—"

He did not finish the sentence, but dropped to the ground in a swoon.

Frank was just about to lift the man's head from the ground when a startling occurrence took place.

Almost in a second a party of strange-looking men burst upon them from all sides.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNKNOWN RACE.

Our little party of friends sprang to their feet, and then stood perfectly still for a moment, gazing at the strange-looking people who had so unexpectedly surrounded them.

We say strange-looking people, for while they were people beyond a doubt, they did not bear much resemblance to any civilized or barbaric race known by any of the party.

In height they would have ranged from five to five feet six inches, so it will be seen that they were below the average in that direction.

Their skin was almost as white as that of either of the boys, and nearly every one of them wore long black beards, some of which reached nearly to their knees. Their faces wore a decided intellectual look, and their bodies were well formed, showing that they were strong and hardy.

Probably the strangest thing about them, after all, was their manner of dress.

All wore long leggings, which seemed to fit them skin-tight,

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while about the waist short skirts were fastened, resembling those of a ballet dancer for all the world.

Their breasts and shoulders were covered with capes that ran to a long point in the back, and in several cases even extended below the skirts.

This briefly described attire was of a very fine texture, and was of every hue and color that could be imagined.

How these strange people had managed to surround them so completely, without being observed by the party, they were at a loss to understand; but they were there, and there was over a hundred of them, too.

Frank was the first to recover from his astonishment at the unexpected appearance of the gaudy, not to say fantastic crowd, and folding his arms, he gazed coolly at those who confronted him, and said:

"Don't attack us; we are friends, and mean you no harm."

He hardly expected that his words would be understood, but what was his surprise when one of the unknown race, who was apparently a leader among them, stepped out from the circle, and waving his hand for his followers to lower their weapons, which consisted solely of short spears, he cleared his throat, and puffed his chest out in a very important way.

"Strangers," said he, in fairly good English, "I can speak your language, and understand what you say. I learned it long ago from some of your race, who were foolish enough to venture in this country, which is for none save the Laking people. You must turn back at once, or else show some good reason for coming here."

For a moment Frank was completely nonplussed, and then he thought of the contents of the pocketbook given them by Bony Larkins.

Hastily producing the article in question from his person, he drew out the piece of ivory and held it up in plain view.

The most abject silence prevailed among his companions, and they watched him with as much interest as did the unknown race.

"Here!" went on the boy, boldly, "do you recognize this? Will this buy our way into the realms of your land?"

The spokesman of the crowd gazed at it in astonishment for a moment; then rushing forward, he eagerly demanded that Frank should let him examine it.

The boy at once complied with his request, and after examining it for fully five minutes, he turned and spoke a few words in his own tongue to his followers. Then, retaining the piece of ivory, he faced Frank and his companion, saying:

"You got this from the only person who ever came to this land and escaped with his life; you have brought it back; very good! Now I will say in behalf of my people that you are welcome here. But since you have come here you must expect to remain here always! Never attempt to leave this land on pain of instant death; follow me and I will conduct you to our solare."

"Come on!" exclaimed Frank, turning to his companions; "we will see the thing through, at all hazards."

As he ceased speaking four men marched forward, and picking up the still unconscious form of the Frenchman, started slowly down the mountainside.

Darkness set in before they reached their destination, so they were not able to see much of the country that consisted of the domain of the unknown race.

They were conscious of the fact that they had entered a comparatively thickly populated village after a while, and presently they were ordered to halt in front of a tall wooden edifice.

Sam Singleby, Oliver and the Zulu were conducted inside of this without further ceremony, while Frank was led further along

until they came to a finely-modeled stone building, which appeared more grand than anything he had yet seen.

"You are to be the guest of the solare," said the man who had acted as spokesman on the mountain. "Enter. To-morrow you will be questioned as to how you came by the piece of ivory I hold in my possession."

A door swung open and Frank was led inside.

Then the four bearers who were carrying the body of Jaques Lecairo started away with their burden and disappeared in the gloom.

Frank's conductor led him along a wide hallway until they came to a heavy-curtained doorway.

Then hastily turning, he bade the boy good-night, and left him alone in the semi-darkness of the place.

"By Jove!" muttered the boy. "A queer proceeding this. He evidently means for me to enter through this curtained doorway. Well, I shan't be surprised at anything I see inside." He pushed the curtain aside and stepped into a room lighted by a flickering torchlight stuck in a crevice of the wall.

Before he had a chance to take in his surroundings there was a low growl, and the next instant a heavy animal sprang upon him and bore him to the ground.

CHAPTER X.

STRANGE OCCURRENCES.

The building into which Frank Lowe's three companions had been conducted contained several good-sized rooms, and into one of these our friends were at once hustled:

There was no light in the place, and as they could not make the men who had charge of them understand what they wanted, they were forced to submit to take up their quarters in the dark room.

As soon as they were inside a slight grating sound was heard, and then all was as silent as the grave.

"A very strange way to be treated, I must say," remarked Sam, as he began groping about the place.

Suddenly it occurred to Sam to strike a match.

As nothing had been taken from any of them, he had no difficulty in producing one of these useful articles from the stock he carried.

Quickly striking it, he held it aloft, and as the flickering flame grew brighter they saw that the room was of a circular shape, but not a window or door could be seen.

Sam rubbed his eyes in a very much perplexed state of mind.

"Oliver," said he, "I believe the place is bewitched! Where is the door we came in at? I won't be surprised if I see half a dozen ghosts before morning."

"Hoh, Lord!" groaned the Englishman, falling upon his knees, "don't talk like that, sir; for hif you do Hi shall 'ave ha fit. Hi vish I vos back hin Vitechapel, blawst me hif I don't!"

For a moment Sam forgot about their peculiar situation and stood gazing at the superstitious fellow before him. The mere mention of ghosts in his present state of mind had nearly frightened Oliver out of his wits.

But Sam was suddenly called to himself by the match going out, and then making up his mind to be surprised at nothing, he gave his English servant a smart poke in the ribs, to let him know that he was no ghost, at any rate, and bade him to crawl over to a soft spot and go to sleep.

This Oliver at length did, but not without considerable groaning and ejaculations of fear; and then, being tired and worn out, Sam coiled himself up on the floor and was soon in the land of dreams.

It must have been near noon on the following day when he awoke; and when he did so he was conscious of a queer dizziness in his head, which so muddled his brain that it was some time before he could recollect what had happened the night before.

Presently it came to him, and raising himself to a sitting posture he prepared to take in his surroundings.

It was very light in the place, and as Sam gazed about the room a puzzled expression came over his face.

He blinked like an owl, and then pinched himself to see if he was really awake.

Becoming satisfied that he was, he arose to his feet—not from the hard floor he went to sleep upon the night before, but a soft couch of skins.

While the inmates of the strange circular chamber had been asleep a transformation scene had taken place.

The room was now handsomely furnished in a quaint way, and there were at least half a dozen windows in it.

In the center was a tray containing a delicious-looking breakfast, and as soon as Sam's eyes lit upon this he found that he was very hungry.

Remembering that he had made up his mind to be surprised at nothing, he started toward it.

But as he did so he thought of Bolo and Oliver, and he again cast his eyes about the room.

He was not surprised at all when he observed them lying upon couches similar to the one he had just arisen from.

"Come, Bolo—Oliver! get up and get your breakfast," said he.

But neither of the objects of his attention moved, but kept on breathing regularly in a sound sleep.

"We must have been drugged in some manner," thought Sam. "It seems that I was the first to awaken; but, never mind; here is our breakfast waiting for us, and I am going to wake them."

He shook the Zulu smartly by the shoulder, and that individual roused up almost instantly, yawning as if he had been asleep for a whole week.

As his eyes rested upon Sam a look of intelligence came over his face, and when he saw the changed appearance of the room he just merely nodded his head as though he had half expected it.

But when Sam succeeded in rousing Oliver to his right senses, that functionary nearly had a fit on the spot.

It was rather strange about the Englishman. He was one of the bravest in the midst of danger and when there had to be any fighting done, but as soon as he saw some extraordinary thing that he was unable to account for his superstitious nature made him a rank coward.

At length, after considerable sharp talking, Sam succeeded in allaying his fears somewhat, and when he saw the tray containing the eatables he returned to something like his own self.

Everything was finely cooked and was simply delicious.

There were two earthen vessels on the tray, one of which contained water and the other a dark-looking liquid.

Oliver placed his nose to this and took a sniff.

"Whew!" he whistled; "hit smells like porter; Hi guess Hi'll sample hit."

He placed the vessel to his mouth and swallowed a mouthful of its contents. Then he smacked his lips and took a deep draught.

"Ave some?" asked he, tending it to the Zulu. "Hi don't know vot in ther dickens hit is, but hit tastes like vine hand hold porter mixed, hand hit hare good!"

Bolo shook his head with an expression of disgust on his face.

"No, my brother," returned he; "it is something that will cause drunkenness, and I have yet to taste of strong drink."

Sam also declined with thanks, and stuck to the pure, cold water the other vessel contained.

"Good!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Since no von will join me, Hi vill drink hup ther 'ole pot by myself. 'Ere goes!"

He took another draught, and then placing the vessel on the floor, began to grow quite hilarious.

He sang a few bars of an English song, and then rising to his feet, executed an impromptu dance.

The Zulu was disgusted with the performance, but Sam laughed in spite of himself.

Oliver then drank the balance of the liquor, and then promptly rolled over and began to snore.

"That must be powerful stuff to knock out a person as quick as that," remarked Sam. "I wonder if—"

His words were cut short, for at that moment a sliding noise was heard, and a part of the very wall itself slid back; the next moment a man entered, and bowing low, stood before them without uttering a word.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK'S QUEER ADVENTURE.

As Frank Lowe was hurled to the ground as he entered the curtained doorway, the breath was knocked from his body and he was rendered partly unconscious.

It had all happened so suddenly that for the space of half a minute the boy was completely dazed.

He felt a weight upon his chest, and as his full faculties returned to him he opened his eyes.

Horror upon horrors! what did he see?

A magnificent specimen of a male lion stood over him, its forefeet upon his chest, and its fiery eyes glowing upon him like two living coals.

As the boy opened his eyes the lion uttered a low growl and began licking its chops fiercely.

Frank had been in a good many tight places since he had set out upon his journey, but this was far worse than anything he had yet passed through.

A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead and his very heart ceased to beat for a moment.

He felt that he was doomed—utterly doomed! and expected every second to be his last.

But the terrible beast did not seem to be in any great hurry to make an end of him; it just held him in one position with its heavy paws, and never took those fiery eyes from his.

Finally a thought struck Frank.

He would move, and that would probably cause the lion to grow angry and finish his work. Then it would all be over and his torture would be done.

Closing his eyes, he uttered a silent prayer, and then made a sudden movement, as if to throw the beast from him.

But no! the scheme did not work; the lion made a quick movement, and recovering itself, assumed the same old position.

A wild hope sprang into Frank's breast.

Surely if the beast would stand such a rough movement as that without tearing him to pieces, he might stand a show of killing it with his revolver.

No sooner thought of than the boy's hand was upon the heavy revolver in his belt.

The lion growled a little, but did not make the least effort to do him any further harm.

A moment more and the muzzle of the revolver was within three inches of the terrible beast's left eye.

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Nerving himself, Frank placed his finger upon the trigger, and—

Clang!

At that very instant a gong sounded with a loud noise, and before the revolver could be discharged the lion sprang from the boy's body and disappeared as if by magic.

"Heavens!" thought Frank, "what has happened now?"

Still grasping the revolver in his hand, he arose slowly to his feet.

Even as he did so a slight rustle was heard, and the figure of a female glided into the room.

Frank stood there in the uncertain light caused by the flickering torch, and as his gaze rested upon the girl—for such she was—he could not suppress a cry of admiration.

The girl did not seem to be very much surprised, but returned his gaze with interest, just the least vestige of a smile playing about her lips.

She was not more than fifteen, and was rather tall for one of the peculiar race to whom she belonged. She was attired in a long robe of gauzy material of the most delicate variegated colors, which flashed like a sheen of silver and gold at every movement of her well-formed body. Her face seemed to be, to Frank, the most beautiful one he had ever looked upon; her dark eyes shone like diamonds, and her long, raven-black hair hung in a misty veil almost to her delicate, shapely feet. A jeweled necklace surrounded her snowy-white neck, and dazzling bracelets were on her exquisitely molded wrists. Taking her, all in all, as she stood there before the mystified boy, she was what might be called "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

Probably a silence of fully five minutes ensued, and then Frank spoke.

"Miss," said he, "will you kindly direct me to what I am to do? I am a stranger in a strange place, and am at a loss how to act."

The girl at once replied in a language that was entirely unknown to the boy adventurer, so he saw that it was utterly useless to attempt to hold any conversation with her.

There was a pile of skins in the center of the room, and after a moment's pause the vision of female loveliness motioned him to seat himself upon it.

Then, quick as a flash, she left the room, leaving the boy in a very perplexed state of mind.

Probably ten minutes passed, when the curtain of skins was thrust aside where Frank had entered, and the man who had conducted him there came in.

The boy's face brightened up.

Here was a chance to talk to somebody who could understand him, and, most likely, give him some information.

"Hello, my man!" said he, "I wish you would explain matters a bit. I can't understand all this; I have been attacked by a lion, and just as I was going to shoot him a gong sounded and he left me like a shot. Then the most beautiful girl I ever saw appeared before me; and now I am so much mixed up that if something is not explained pretty soon I believe I shall retire from this place and look up my companions and see what has befallen them."

The man smiled and shrugged his shoulders at the conclusion of Frank's speech, and seating himself on the skins beside him, began to talk.

"Young man," said he, "are you not aware that the token of ivory I took from you denoted that the bearer of it seeks an audience with the solare of the Laking people?"

"I did not know it," replied Frank.

"It is true, nevertheless. But few of our people ever come in

possession of one of these tokens, and when they do they forward it to the solare, or queen, as it is termed in your language; and she grants an audience, providing they are able to surmount the dangers and difficulties which strew the path that leads to the royal chamber. I led you to the threshold of the commencement of the path, thinking that it was your intention to see her. The lion who attacked you and held you down is trained for that purpose. It is to test your courage, for none but a brave man has ever seen and talked to the solare—knowing that it was she!"

"Have you?" asked Frank.

"Oh, yes, many years ago I worked my way to her royal presence, and owing to the excellent manner in which I did it, I was appointed adviser to her. You say a beautiful girl appeared to you after the lion had left. If you had followed her you would have taken the next step on the way."

"Have I still the privilege of going on?"

"Yes, sir; you have."

"You say that none but a brave man has ever seen and talked with the solare, knowing that it was she. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this, sir: Almost every day she appears among our people, but she is disguised, so that none can tell who she is. There are many among our people—eight or ten thousand—and out of all of those it would be hard to pick out the solare, unless by some one who thoroughly knew her."

Frank was becoming more deeply interested every moment. He now made up his mind that he was going to have an audience with the queen if he died in the attempt.

"What is your name, my man?" he asked.

"Zex," was the reply.

"All right, Mr. Zex; give me something to eat, and let me rest a while, and then I shall be ready to continue the journey to seek an audience with the solare."

Zex bowed himself out, and returned in about half an hour with a plentiful supply of food on a tray.

"Eat," said he, "and when you get ready continue on your journey. The lion will not trouble you again, but other things will before you are through. Have confidence and all will be well."

The next moment he was gone, and being reassured, Frank began eagerly devouring the meal, for he was quite hungry.

He had barely finished when he heard a movement before him. Glancing up he beheld the girl who had before confronted him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ZULU FINDS HIS FATHER.

The man who entered the apartment where Sam Singleby and his two companions were, was very fantastically dressed, was very short in stature, and wore an exceedingly long beard.

"Good-morning," said Sam, politely.

The newcomer nodded his head, as if he fully understood the remark, and motioned for them to get up and follow him.

"Can you speak our language?" asked Sam.

The man nodded his head.

"Yes," replied he; "I speak a little. Man like him learn me," and he pointed to Bolo.

The Zulu gave a start that astonished the Laking.

"Where is the man like me, my brother?" he hurriedly asked.

"Will take you to him now. Come on; leave the man who took too much drink where he is; he will be taken care of."

Full of curiosity Sam obeyed, followed by Bolo who was very much excited over the prospect of finding his father.

After traversing a short passage, they came outside in the open air.

It was just about midday, and the sun shining from directly overhead sent forth a fierce heat.

But the Laking village was built in the midst of a grove of trees, and, consequently, it was comparatively shady and cool.

There were no streets or roadways cut through it at all; the houses were built here, there and everywhere.

Some were built of wood and others of stone, and all showed a certain degree of fair architecture and workmanship.

The majority of them were built sixteen feet square, or in a circular form, and were covered with a coating resembling paint of different colors.

Sam took notice of these things as he walked along, but before he could take any further observations their guide came to a halt in front of a small wooden house, which was of a strictly white color.

A venerable-looking black was seated in front of it, and three or four mulatto children were playing about his feet.

He looked up from the ground as the Laking approached with Sam and the Zulu, and as his eyes rested upon them he uttered a cry of astonishment, intermingled with delight, and sprang to his feet as quickly as his aged condition would allow him.

"What is it, oh, my brothers!" he exclaimed; "has it come to pass that the Great Ruler of the universe has at last sent some of my former brethren to me? The sky is clear, the sun shines bright, the birds sing in the wilderness, and Zeika is happy. He feels like a young warrior again, when his eyes rest upon one of his own kind; and he would shake the hand of the brother of his own color, and also of his white companion."

This was spoken in the Zulu tongue, and, of course, Sam could not understand a word of it. But Bolo did, and replying in the same language, he seized the old man by the hands and kissed him reverently upon the forehead.

Then for the next fifteen minutes nothing was heard save the ceaseless chatter of the two Zulus, and Sam in the meantime studied the peculiar habits of the children close by.

At length the conversation began to lag, and then turning to Sam, Bolo said:

"My brother, this is indeed my father. I have found him after many years, thinking he had perished in the Death Lands. He is now seventy years old, and," he added a little sadly, "he is married to his third wife and has nineteen children living."

"A very good showing, I am sure," replied the boy, stepping up and shaking the old man by the hand, and not cracking a smile meanwhile.

Seeing that they were now sufficiently introduced, the Laking who had brought them there saluted respectfully and took his departure.

"Come inside, my son, and you, too, my white brother," said the old Zulu, leading the way inside the house.

There were three or four rooms in it, and these were neat and tidy and presented a semi-civilized appearance.

Sam and Bolo seated themselves upon a rough bench and Zeika entered one of the other rooms and presently returned with a rather young and pretty Laking woman, whom he introduced as his wife.

Bolo kissed his stepmother upon the forehead—with a certain degree of coolness, perhaps—and Sam shook hands with her, wondering all the time why such a comely looking woman was satisfied with an ugly, scar-faced, aged Zulu for a husband.

Then Zeika proceeded to relate all that had happened since the event of his arrival in the Laking Land, telling all about how Bony Larkins and his companions had attempted to escape and

how he had settled down and took a wife, being fully contented with the mode of life led by the Laking people, who were a thrifty and intelligent race and were well advanced in many arts and trades of the civilized world.

He also stated that their ruler was invariably a woman; that her husband had absolutely nothing to say about the affairs of the country whatever, and that when she died, if she had not a daughter to fill her place, her nearest female relative took the throne.

The old Zulu went on talking about the unknown race until finally Sam thought it proper to ask him one question.

"Zeika," said he, "how was it that we went to sleep in a room with no windows, doors, or furniture in it last night, and when we awoke this morning it was altogether different?"

"You were drugged, my brother, and then carried in another room. That was done to impress you. I tell you, brother, you will see and pass through many strange things before you become accustomed to the people of this place."

"Humph!" thought Sam, "there is nothing very strange about it after all. I don't think I shall be much puzzled at anything further that happens."

But Sam was destined to be puzzled more than once before he left the land of the Laking people.

He started for the door of Zeika's hut and was just in time to see a curious, not to say striking, sight outside.

Passing the house just at that moment was Oliver Looney in a very unsteady condition, with a Laking woman on either side of him, engaged in the occupation of keeping him from falling to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRANK STARTS TO SEE THE LAKING QUEEN.

Frank Lowe sprang to his feet as he saw the girl in the room before him.

"I'll follow you this time," he thought, "and see the end of this curious adventure."

The girl gazed at him in an expectant manner, and plucking up courage, the boy started toward her, motioning that he was ready to follow her.

A smile of satisfaction stole over her face, and, throwing a curtain aside, she slowly left the room, followed by Frank.

A flight of stone steps was now before them, and without a word the girl began to descend them.

Down they went for at least fifty steps, and then they arrived at the beginning of a long hallway.

Straight along this for perhaps fifty yards, and the boy's fair conductor came to a halt.

This place, like the rooms above, was dimly lighted, and Frank saw another curtain before him.

But there was no time for him to form any conjectures as to what lay beyond, for, throwing the curtain aside, his conductor motioned him to enter.

The next moment he was in a medium-sized apartment, in the center of which was a sort of divan covered with soft skins.

Hardly knowing why he did so, Frank seated himself upon it.

It was cool and refreshing in the room, and a delicious, fragrant odor pervaded the atmosphere.

A sort of dreamy feeling came over the young adventurer, and closing his eyes, he settled himself back in a reclining position, and, for the time being, he was at peace with the whole world.

Presently the sounds of soft music, as if being played a long distance away, came upon his ears. Then a voice—and such a

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voice—burst forth in a melodious strain, and Frank lay and listened, drinking it in with the raptures of one of the blest.

For fully ten minutes the music and singing kept up, and then suddenly it ceased as if by magic.

The next moment there was a rush of cool air, and the room grew dark as pitch.

Frank started to his feet.

His spell of enchantment was broken.

"What is going to happen now, I wonder?" he thought.

He was not kept long in suspense.

A dozen hands were laid upon him as quick as a flash of lightning, and before he knew what had taken place he was whisked from the place and carried swiftly along a dark passage.

In a minute or two he was placed upon his feet, and then the sound of receding footsteps was heard and he was alone.

Alone? No!

The appalling silence which hung over the place was suddenly broken by an ominous hiss.

In spite of the fact that the boy was prepared for most anything, a horrible shudder came over him.

Producing a match from his pocket, he struck it and held it aloft.

A startling sight met his gaze.

The floor of the room was literally covered with serpents!

Big, little and medium sized, but all horrible and loathsome in appearance.

If there was anything that Frank dreaded in the whole world, it was a snake.

He had often remarked that he would rather face a lion than have a snake turn on him.

Now he was in a very nest of them.

His first thought was to flee from the spot, but the slimy, crawling things were all around him, and he could not see a single spot where it was large enough to make a step without placing his foot upon one or more of them.

"My God!" exclaimed the boy, a cold sweat breaking out upon his forehead, "this is awful! What shall I do?"

At that moment his match went out and he was left in darkness.

The serpents now began crawling about the ground, hissing in concert, it seemed, and as one big fellow touched his leg and began slowly coiling itself about it, Frank could not repress a cry of horror.

He forgot all about the mission he had started on, and that he had been told by Zex that he would have to surmount dangers and difficulties ere he saw the queen.

His mind only dwelt on one thought now, and that was the terrible position he was placed in.

Clang!

A gong sounded exactly the same as when the lion was upon him, and a moment later the snakes had left him, and he felt that he was the only living thing in the room.

A queer sensation of relief came over him, and he felt like falling to the floor.

But recovering himself, he lighted another match.

He was right in his conjecture; he was alone, standing upon a smooth, rocky floor.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, coming fully to himself again. "Why should I become frightened? I was told as much as though nothing would harm me."

The light from his match showed him an opening a few feet ahead of him, and again making a resolve not to be surprised at anything that might happen to him, he passed boldly through it.

He now found himself in a narrow passage, with a dim light showing in the distance.

Along this Frank started, and in a minute or two he arrived at its end, where a torch was burning.

He stepped forth into a good-sized chamber, in the center of which one of the Laking people was standing.

"Well," said Frank, addressing him, forgetful of the fact that he was not likely to be understood, "what am I to go through next?"

Without vouchsafing any reply the man held forth his hand, with a small article between his fingers.

A glance showed Frank that it was the piece of ivory which Zex had taken from him on the mountainside.

"Oh!" thought he, "you want me to take that and deliver it to the solare, or queen. All right."

He put forth his hand to grasp it, but, to his astonishment, the Laking suddenly drew it back, and laughed in a mocking manner.

Then the fantastically attired being began dancing about the boy, as if inviting him to a conflict.

Presently he placed the piece of ivory directly under his nose, and then suddenly drew it back again.

Becoming exasperated, Frank suddenly shot out his right fist and caught the fellow on the nose, knocking him flat on his back.

The Laking tossed the piece of ivory to the boy, and then began rolling about the floor, howling like a crazy man.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank, "he evidently got just what he was looking for," and stooping, he picked up the piece of ivory and placed it in his pocket.

In a minute or two the Laking got upon his feet and darted from the place.

Almost at the same instant the girl whom he had met before appeared, and, without a word, motioned him to follow her.

Frank was all attention now, and he obeyed with wonderful alacrity.

Passing through an arched doorway, the girl came to a halt.

Frank gave a start as he reached her side. He was standing on the brink of a chasm!

Placing one hand upon his shoulder, the beautiful Laking gazed up into his eyes, and then, pointing downward with the other, motioned him to jump.

A shade of hesitancy came over him. He had passed through safely enough so far, but should he court what seemed to be certain death by leaping into that yawning black hole?

It appeared to be a very rash thing to do, and yet, as the boy gazed into the beautiful girl's eyes and saw that she was really in earnest for him to do as she directed, he made up his mind to make the jump.

"Well, here goes!" he muttered.

The next moment he sprang clear of the ledge, and disappeared in the darkness below.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLIVER BECOMES ENGAGED.

Let us now return to Jaques Lecairo, the Frenchman, and see how he fared in the hands of the unknown race.

Owing to his half-starved and exhausted condition, he remained in a sort of stupor until his bearers placed him upon a soft couch in one of the houses of the village.

A decoction of herbs and drugs was mixed and given to him, and almost immediately he came to his senses and sat bolt upright.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

And then, as he caught sight of the strange people about him, he fainted dead away and sank back again.

The Frenchman's journey across the swamp lands and over the mountains had been as terrible as it was persistent.

When he had fallen from the tree after firing the shot which had so nearly ended Frank's life, he had struck in a pool of water.

This was the means of saving his rascally life; and, sputtering and blinded by the muddy water, he was helped out by Wampi and placed upon dry land.

We will not dwell on the many perilous incidents they passed through, but suffice it to say that before they had half crossed the Death Lands Wampi perished in the quicksands, dying a miserable death.

Jacques Lecairo was now left alone, and how he ever managed to penetrate the dreaded swamps he never exactly knew himself.

But he stuck to the comparatively plain trail like a sleuth-hound, and at length, more dead than alive, he overtook the little party, as has already been described.

* * * * *

Sam Singleby laughed heartily when he saw Oliver Looney and the two Laking women passing in front of Zeika's house.

Bolo only shrugged his shoulders and said:

"My brother, it appears that your white servant has fallen in love. I prophesy that he will be a married man before many days."

"Do you think so, Bolo?" asked Sam.

"Yes," was the reply. "Look at my father; there is an example for you."

At this moment a mulatto youth walked up and entered the house.

"I wonder who that was?" said Sam.

"I don't know; probably it is my half-brother," replied Bolo.

He was right. Almost in a minute the boy came out again, followed by Zeika.

"My son!" exclaimed the venerable Zulu, laying his hand upon Bolo's shoulder, "this is your half-brother. Embrace him."

Bolo obeyed at once, and presently the newly-found relatives were chatting pleasantly enough.

Zeika's Laking son, whose name was Danst, could speak three languages quite fluently—Zulu, English and Laking—and on being introduced, Sam took quite a liking to him.

He questioned the boy as to where the two Laking women were taking the Englishman.

"Oh, they have both chosen him for a husband, and are taking him before the high priest to let him decide which one shall have him. You know, if a man speaks tenderly to a woman in this country she at once takes it for granted that he desires her for a wife. Your friend has evidently been making love to the pair of them," replied Danst.

"Phew!" whistled Sam.

Come on, Bolo, and let's see how Oliver makes out.

The Zulu guide was willing, and so the two followed Danst through the crowded lanes and byways of the village until they arrived at a pretentious-looking dwelling nearly in the center of it.

Quite a crowd of the gaudily attired race were collected about the entrance, and pushing their way through, they at once entered.

The lower part of the high priest's house contained but one room, and that was in the shape of a circle.

In the center was a raised platform, upon which sat the functionary who was to pass judgment upon the case of Oliver and the two women.

He was attired in a scarlet robe and wore all sorts of ornaments upon his person.

As Danst edged his way into the room, followed by Sam and Bolo, one of the women was telling her side of the story.

At Sam's request Danst translated it to him.

The case was something like the following:

When Oliver recovered somewhat from his drunken stupor, after his two companions had left the house, he found a woman engaged in clearing away the remains of their breakfast.

As she was young and rather pretty, he arose to his feet and playfully chuckled her under the chin.

She did not seem to be displeased, but left the room at once, greatly to the Englishman's astonishment.

He started to follow her and met another woman, who was also young, but not quite as good-looking as the other.

But this fact made no difference to Oliver, and he stopped and winked at her, and then threw an imaginary kiss at her.

Then he was astonished again, for she also disappeared from his presence to some other part of the house.

He scratched his head in a bewildered manner for several minutes, and then concluded that he had better start out to look for his companions.

But just as he was about to leave the house the first woman he had met came up dressed in a very gorgeous manner, and took him by the arm.

"Hi say there, me girl, let gó! 'anged hif Hi like this, you know."

Just then the other woman appeared, and took him by the opposite arm.

Then they began to jabber away at a great rate, and finally, getting mad, nearly pulled poor Oliver apart.

But presently they decided to leave it to the high priest as to who was best entitled to him, and away they started.

The Laking priest listened to both sides of the story in a very dignified manner, and then, after deliberating for a while, decided that woman No. 1 was entitled to the strange white man for a husband.

Upon hearing this decision the other woman at once let go of Oliver, and relinquished all claim upon him.

The Englishman was in a very unsteady condition, and this movement on her part caused him to lose his balance and fall flat upon the floor.

The Laking woman, who gloried in the name of Sextupuaga, lifted her affianced to his feet, and assisted him outside into the open air.

Oliver did not know any more about what had occurred than did the man in the moon.

But that made no difference to the woman. She regarded him as just a degree above the race to which she belonged, and she was very proud of having secured the prize.

She called one of the men who could speak a little English and bade him to inform Oliver of what had occurred, and also that he must be prepared to wed her in six days from date.

"Vot!" exclaimed the surprised Englishman, when he understood the situation, "me get married? Not hif Hi knows hit. Vy, Hi ham hopposed to vimmen, hand halways vas."

"Allow me to congratulate you on your excellent choice," said Sam, at that moment coming up and shaking him by the hand.

"His hit so, Mr. Sam, that Hi've got ter marry this woman?" asked he, brightening up just a little as he saw who was addressing him.

"Yes, Oliver, according to the laws of this country, you have," returned the boy, without a smile; "and," he added, "I hope you will be very happy."

The soon-to-be bridegroom cast a frightened look around him.

as if seeking an avenue of escape from the dreadful doom that awaited him.

"Hoh, Lord!" he exclaimed, and then making a sudden bolt, darted away through the dispersing crowd.

CHAPTER XV.

FRANK LOWE'S SUCCESS.

As Frank Lowe made the leap and felt himself going down, down into the unfathomable darkness below, he almost gave himself up as lost.

But, no! Before he had shot through twenty feet of space he struck plump into a strong net, and then rolled over on his side, without the least vestige of a bruise upon his body.

A sense of relief came over him, and he did not attempt to extricate himself from his position.

The strange and thrilling events he had passed through since he had arrived in the Laking village were running through his mind like a misty dream, when suddenly he felt the net gradually tightening about him.

The next moment he felt as if he was incased in a bag, and then he began slowly to ascend.

Presently he felt himself drawn over the edge of the chasm, and the next instant the net was thrown from him, and he stood upon his feet.

A torchlight suddenly illuminated the scene, and two Laking men stood before him.

One of them was Zex, who at once spoke.

"Friend," said he, "you have done remarkably well. But one ever took that leap voluntarily before you in the last fifty years, and that one was myself. All others had to be pushed over the brink while they hesitated. Come! all trouble is over now. You may now see and talk with the solare."

It was a feeling of deep relief, intermingled with one of pride, that Frank followed the two men into the chamber where he had knocked the Laking down and secured the piece of ivory.

To his astonishment he was conducted back exactly over the same path he had traversed. But no signs of any serpents or anything else came in their way, and presently they stood in the room where the lion had met him.

"Now," said Zex, "pass through that doorway yonder, and walk along the passage until you come to another. The solare is in that room; present the ivory token, and all will be well. Your language is well understood by her, as it has been one of the studies of our race since it was first introduced by your people, who first came here a long while ago. Go on; we will leave you now."

Thanking Zex for the many points he had given him, Frank waved his hand and left the room.

Acting fully on his instructions, he soon arrived at a richly-curtained doorway, which he knew led to the presence of the queen.

At that moment the curtain was thrown back and a musical voice bade him enter.

Without any further hesitation Frank stepped boldly in.

The girl who had twice before met him during his journey stood before him.

A pleased look was upon her face, and bowing politely, she said, in remarkably good English:

"Come in, sir. As I am now able to talk to you, I bid you welcome."

Frank blushed like a schoolboy, but recovering himself, took a step or two forward.

"Will you grant me one favor?" he asked, in an earnest tone.

"What is it?"

"Tell me your name. I have seen a great many ladies in the different countries I have traveled through, but I must frankly tell you that you are the most beautiful I ever had the pleasure of meeting."

The girl replied in a low, faltering voice:

"I am Alare, the solare's daughter. Prepare yourself now to meet my mother, who will be glad to see you, since you braved the apparent dangers in such an extraordinary manner in your attempt to see her."

Then she led him through another doorway, and Frank was in the presence of the queen of the Laking people.

She was seated upon a throne in a very gorgeously-appearing room, and as Frank approached her, he followed the example set by his fair companion and bowed almost to the floor.

At this the queen, who was rather fat and fluffy-looking, struck a small silver gong and the two arose to their feet.

"My son," she said, "you have come from afar to seek me; now you have found me—what is your mission in coming to this land?"

For a moment the boy was at a loss as to what reply he should make, but suddenly he thought of the diamond he had in his possession, which Bony Larkins had stolen from the queen's crown years before.

He saw a splendid way out of the difficulty.

"Most gracious solare," began he, bringing forth all his oratorical powers at one jump, "I have come all the way from my land, many miles away, to bring to you a diamond which was stolen a long time ago from the crown you wear. Will it be accepted from me—and may my companions and myself be forgiven for trespassing in your land?"

"Let me see the diamond. If what you say is true I shall be glad that you have come, for the crown jewels are held sacred by me, and the return of one that has been missing so long will indeed be a wonderful thing."

Frank produced the diamond and handed it to her.

The queen gave a start as her eyes rested upon the gem, and a cry of joy escaped her lips.

"It is the lost jewel, indeed!" she exclaimed. "My son, you have conferred a great favor upon the Laking race by returning this to where it belongs. There is only one request that I will ever refuse to grant you until your dying day, and that is to leave this land. Wear this and you will be granted the privileges of my own children."

She placed a curious necklace of ivory balls about his neck.

Frank bowed low and murmured his thanks.

"You may retire now, and henceforth you may come and go at will. Zex, my most trusted adviser, will place a dwelling at your disposal for the use of yourself and friends. There is only one thing that I warn you of, and that is: never attempt to cross the mountains that surround our land. If you do certain death awaits you!"

The boy again bowed, and then left her majesty's presence, followed by Alare.

"Stay!" exclaimed the queen. "One moment, please."

Frank halted.

"Here is the ivory token. In recognition of the valuable service you have rendered me by bringing back the crown diamond, you may take this and present it to your most trusted friend, and allow him the privilege of seeking an audience with me."

"Thanks!"

He accepted the piece of ivory, and in a moment he and the girl were in the other room.

"Now, Miss Alare, I must leave you," he said, raising the hand of the beautiful girl to his lips.

To his astonishment Alare uttered a cry of alarm, and the next moment the queen rushed upon the scene with flashing eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUR FRIENDS ARE GIVEN A HOUSE TO LIVE IN.

Frank had no sooner placed the girl's hand to his lips than he saw that he had committed an act that was considered altogether out of order.

Alare's action plainly showed him this; but when her mother burst upon them, her eyes flashing fire, he heartily wished that the ground might open and swallow him from sight.

"How dare you!" thundered the queen. "Don't you know that you have insulted the throne by kissing the hand of the queen's daughter? That act of familiarity is never allowed among our people unless the parties have a settled marriage agreement. The hand of Alare is already promised to a young and estimable man of high standing. This base insult cannot be wiped out; it is the duty of my daughter's promised husband to kill you. That is one of the laws of our country."

"But, your majesty," replied Frank, firing up just a little, "such an act as I have just been guilty of is a mark of respect in my country, and I trust that I may be excused on the grounds of my ignorance of your laws. If I have done anything wrong I am willing to apologize."

"An apology will do no good in this case," replied the angry woman, coldly; "our laws must not—shall not—be broken."

She reached up to pull a cord as she finished speaking.

"One moment!" exclaimed the boy, in a voice full of spirit. "Only a little while ago you told me that you would grant any request I might make, so long as I did not ask to leave this country, did you not?"

The queen staggered back a pace or two, and turned white.

"I did," she returned, "and I never break my promise."

"Then, your majesty, I ask to be forgiven for what wrong I have done."

"Be it so, then, boy. But dare not speak to Alare again on pain of instant death."

"Thank you," said Frank, and bowing, he left the room.

The farther he got away from the royal chamber the better he felt, but he could not help but think of the beautiful girl whom he must never speak to again.

"I wonder what sort of a fellow this lover of Alare's is?" he thought, as he walked along. "Does she think anything of him, I wonder? I must see him; I am deeply interested in her, and if I find that she does not care for him, I'll forget about the solare's command and speak to her whenever I get the chance."

Thus he mused until he reached the outside of the house.

It was after sunrise in the morning, and as Frank observed this fact he was not a little surprised.

"Queer," muttered he. "The rule must be that the queen will grant an interview with a person sending the ivory token to her at any time, whether it be day or night."

Just then he observed Zex coming toward him, and after saluting him, that individual conducted him to a neat-appearing house at the outskirts of the village.

It was all ready to receive him, and being completely worn out by what he had undergone, Frank lay down upon a pile of skins, with the intention of seeking his companions when he awoke.

The afternoon was well spent when he arose, and after eating a meal that had been prepared for him by somebody, while he slept, he felt considerably refreshed.

Then making his way outside, he started toward the center of the village of many-hued houses.

As he neared it he observed quite a crowd coming from one of the buildings, and curious to know what was going on, he hurried toward it.

He was just in time to see the figure of a man, whom he quickly observed to be Oliver Looney, running toward him at the top of his speed.

But that was not all he saw. A woman was after him in hot pursuit, and taking in the situation as a comical one, Frank laughed.

At that moment Sam and the Zulu came up, and after a hearty greeting, they explained the nature of the Englishman's terrible case.

"Well, I don't see why he should be so badly alarmed," remarked Frank.

"Nor I," replied Sam. "But, old fellow, where have you been so long? Tell us what has befallen you since you entered this place?"

"There is only one way for you to find out what I have been through, Sam. Take this piece of ivory and present it to the man known as Zex. He is the one who took it from me on the mountains. If you follow his directions you will pass through exactly what I have, and you will feel yourself well paid. I am not bound to keep my adventures a secret, but for certain reasons, I have concluded to do so. Don't ask me any more questions now; but my advice is to seek an audience with the queen, or solare, as she is called."

Somewhat mystified at Frank's talk, Sam took the ivory token and placed it in his pocket.

"All right. I will do as you say, and seek an audience with the queen."

A little after darkness had set in, Zex led Oliver Looney to his companions, and left him there.

"Well," asked Frank, "how did you make out?"

"Hit his hall settled; Hi'm resigned; Hi'm goin' ter be married to-morrer. First she said a week; but now she says to-morrer. One thing, she hain't so very 'omely."

CHAPTER XVII.

OLIVER LOONEY'S WEDDING.

The next morning, shortly after sunrise, the house of our friends was visited by two Laking men, who bore a good-sized bundle between them.

This consisted of Oliver's wedding outfit, which was invariably furnished by the bride in that country.

Frank and Sam soon discovered that the biggest part of the clothing worn by the strange race was manufactured from flax, and then dyed through some chemical process.

The Englishman's wedding outfit was simply grand!

The long, skin-tight leggings were a mixture of vermillion and pink, the skirt was grass-green, and the cape was a beautiful clouded blue; a white head covering with a yellow plume, and a pair of crocodile-skin sandals, and the rig was complete.

After breakfast Oliver reluctantly donned the gaudy toggery.

"When does the ceremony take place in which my English brother is to take a wife?" asked Bolo.

"Hoh, Lord! right haway, Hi suppose. Hif Hi don't 'urry hup Hi hexpect she will be hafter me pretty soon. Blawst the bloomin' place, hanyhow."

He was about right in his expectations, for hardly had he ceased speaking when the beautiful and gushing Sextupuaga appeared, coming toward the house with all possible speed.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

Oliver groaned, but bracing himself for the ordeal, strode hastily out to meet her.

The meeting was a very affectionate one. His affianced hugged him and then kissed him on the nose, which evidences of affection Oliver awkwardly returned, greatly to the delight of the two boys.

The couple started toward the priest's house, followed by the two boys; and presently, knowing what was going to take place, quite a crowd of the Lakings joined in the procession.

The ceremony was to take place in the open air, and a movable platform had been placed in the center of the little square, in front of the Laking priest's house, for the purpose.

Frank and Sam were treated with more than ordinary respect, and were invited by the priest to take a seat upon the platform.

The master of ceremonies then motioned for the couple to step upon the platform and be married.

There was a momentary break in the crowd, and Oliver sprang nimbly up, followed by Sextupuaga, who was dressed to kill.

"Now, hold man, 'eave hahead hand git ther bloomin' performance through with!" exclaimed the Englishman in a loud voice.

The priest did not understand what he said, but began to tie the knot right away, just the same.

After he had joined their hands in a loving clasp he proceeded to recite a long rigmarole in the Laking language, which was so interesting to Frank and Sam that they took a seat upon the ground and nearly fell asleep.

He concluded that part of the interesting service by kissing each of the contracting parties on the forehead; then a wild, weird sort of tune struck up, coming from beneath the platform, and everybody, including the bride and groom, began a fantastic dance.

Then quantities of the intoxicating beverage, which was called *lahni*, was passed around, and after all who cared to had drunk to the future health and happiness of the pair, they were pronounced man and wife amid great cheering by the entire populace.

The *lahni* tasted so good that Oliver wanted more of it, and thinking it best to humor him a little on the start, his wife gave him all he could drink, and then started for the house that had been prepared for them.

But, as is already known, the beverage got in its fine work very quickly, and before they were halfway to his future home, Oliver began to grow hilarious.

"'Oop!" he yelled. "'Urrah for hold Hingland! Hi'm ha married man, hand Hi don't care 'oo knows hit!"

Just then a richly-attired young Laking passed him, scowling fiercely at him as he did so.

Oliver was not slow in noticing this, and being just in the right condition for a row, turned around and faced him, doubling up his fists at the same time.

"Vat hare ye so mad habout?" demanded he. "Hif you vant ter fight, vy, come hon!"

At this the Laking's brow grew as dark as a thundercloud, and drawing a flat wooden instrument from beneath the folds of his skirt, he struck the Englishman a smart blow on the cheek, knocking him down.

The bride began to cry, and implored the enraged Laking to go on and leave her husband alone.

But the young man was evidently not in the mood to do so, for springing upon Oliver's prostrate body, he began to beat him unmercifully about the head and face.

Frank and Sam, who were following the couple up, took in the situation at a glance, and in a moment they were upon the spot.

"What do you mean, you cowardly cur, by hitting a man in that manner when he is down?" exclaimed Frank, rushing up and

dealing the Laking a heavy blow between the eyes with his clinched fist.

Spat! down went the astonished man, flat upon his back, a thousand stars flashing before his startled vision.

Sam raised the Englishman to his feet and quickly hustled him from the spot followed by the weeping bride.

It was at least half a minute before the Laking arose to his feet, and when he did so Frank stood facing him.

His eyes shot forth a vengeful look, and shaking his stick at the boy, he muttered something in his own tongue and then turned upon his heel and hurried from the spot.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Frank. "So you don't want to fight it out, do you? Well, go on; you are a cowardly cur, anyhow."

He was just about to move on when Zex came hurriedly up, a look of extreme annoyance upon his face.

"Boy," said he, in an excited manner, "you have made a mistake. That man you just struck is one of the nobles of this country. He is very vengeful, and will do all he can against you as long as he lives. His name is Hanga, and he is the affianced husband of the queen's daughter, Alare."

"Ah!" thought the boy; "so that is Alare's lover, is it? Well, I'll bet all I am worth she doesn't care a straw for him. If she does, she isn't the kind of a girl I take her to be."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TIGER HUNT.

A week passed. Our friends had now become accustomed to the manner of the inhabitants of the Laking Land; but things had grown so monotonous that they began to long for livelier scenes.

They had been unable to gain much information about the diamond and gold mines in the limits of the vast valley, and they began to study some means of finding them.

As yet Sam had not undertaken the task of seeking an audience with the queen, but he intended to do so at no distant day.

For a wonder, Oliver Looney appeared to be perfectly contented with his married life, and he told the boys that he was not at all sorry that he had taken the important step.

Frank had learned through Zex that Jaques Lecairo had so far recovered from his illness that he was now able to be up and about.

He was also much surprised when he learned that the Frenchman, in some unknown manner, had become an inmate of the house occupied by Hanga, the suitor of the queen's daughter.

"Birds of a feather flock together," thought he; "we must look out for them."

A couple of days later a grand tiger hunt was arranged to take place, and our friends were invited to participate.

Frank and Sam were glad to accept the invitation, and even Bolo said he would go.

Oliver also got the consent of his wife to be one of the party, so at sunrise on the day appointed the tiger hunters were ready to start.

There were twelve Lakings, and counting our friends, the party consisted of sixteen all told.

Zex was in command, and noticing that he was apparently waiting for something, Frank asked what it was.

"We must wait for the horses," replied he; "we are to go mounted, you know."

Neither of the boys had seen over a dozen horses since they had been in the place, and these, for the most part, were very sorry-looking animals.

But what was their surprise, a few minutes later, when sixteen

as fine-looking steeds as they had ever set eyes upon were led prancing up.

"We have not many good horses," said Zex, noticing their surprised looks, "but what we have are reserved strictly for this business. Tiger hunting is dangerous, and the hunters must have good steeds under them. Besides, we will have to travel a great way before we find the animals in plenty."

None of the horses had anything like a saddle upon them, so they were compelled to ride bareback.

But as Frank and Sam had been brought up on a farm they were well used to this, and were soon upon the backs of their animals, as unconcerned as any of the Lakings.

Oliver and Bolo were pretty well up in riding, also, and presently all were ready to start.

The weapons carried by the Lakings were short, keen-edged spears, but our friends carried their rifles, revolvers and hunting-knives.

They had just left the rainbow-hued village behind them and entered a heavy growth of ironwood trees, when the sounds of rapidly-approaching hoofs were heard behind them.

An uneasy look came over the face of Zex, and halting his men, he waited for whoever it might be to come up.

Presently two horsemen came in sight, and as they rapidly came nearer, Frank could not repress a start.

It was no other than Hanga and Jaques Lecairo who were following them.

The Frenchman seemed to have recovered entirely from his recent illness, and as he rode up he bowed politely to the two boys.

Hanga did not notice them in the least, but at once began berating Zex at a great rate in his own language for starting on a tiger hunt without first notifying him.

Zex received the irate man's lecture cool enough, and then, after the two newcomers had joined the ranks, gave the order to start again.

Presently he got an opportunity to whisper to Frank.

"Look out for Hanga," said he. "He has never been on a tiger hunt before; he has some purpose in view, or he never would have come. I don't like the looks of the man who was sick that came here with you, either; he and Hanga seem to be great friends."

Frank nodded, and then told Sam that Hanga was his sworn enemy, and cautioned him to keep a watch upon his movements.

The party kept on until nearly noon, when they forced their way through a thick belt of jungle.

Zex said they had now arrived at the hunting grounds, and bade the boys to be careful.

The Lakings now split up into twos, and began galloping along the edge of the jungle, uttering loud cries to call the tigers forth.

With their rifles ready for instant use, Frank and Sam cantered about the center of the open space and waited to see what would happen.

Presently there was a ferocious, cat-like growl, and a magnificent specimen of the beasts they were in search of sprang into full view, and began lashing its tail furiously.

In a moment or so it was joined by its mate, and both stood with blazing eyes glaring upon the hunters, who began galloping about them in a circle, waiving their short spears in a frantic manner, and shouting at the top of their lungs.

Both the boys felt that they could have easily dispatched the beasts before they had fired half a dozen shots, but they did not interfere; they were anxious to see what the Laking hunters would do.

Seeing that they were interested spectators of the scene, Hanga

thought he would show them what he could do, for suddenly he uttered a wild yell, and leaving the circle of riders, dashed directly toward the furious beasts.

The tigers crouched low to the ground, thrashing their tails and growling in an angry manner.

Just as the young Laking's horse was within a dozen feet of them they made a simultaneous spring toward him.

But they did not reach either the horse or its rider.

By a deft movement the steed sprang nimbly aside and avoided them easily enough.

Then, before they had recovered themselves, Hanga plunged his spear into the heart of the nearest one, killing it almost instantly.

A shout of approval went up from all sides, and even the boys cheered at the wonderful movement.

But the other tiger, which was the male, did not care to be so easily disposed of evidently, for it quickly leaped back a few paces and became very cautious.

Just as Hanga was about to rush down upon him, a startling interruption occurred.

By some unknown cause Oliver Looney's steed at that moment became unmanageable, and darted toward the tiger ahead of Hanga.

In trying to rein up his steed the Englishman dropped his rifle to the ground.

The concussion discharged the weapon, and the horse, becoming doubly frightened at this, gave a maddened plunge, unseating Oliver and throwing him headlong to the ground within a few feet of the savage beast.

Instead of striving to avert the unfortunate man's doom, Hanga sat still on his horse, his arms folded across his breast, and a smile upon his swarthy countenance.

Oliver had been rendered unconscious from the force of his fall, and as he lay there the tiger lowered its belly to the ground and prepared to launch itself upon him.

The two boys thought it high time to interfere.

Placing their rifles to their shoulders, they took aim at the beast and pulled the triggers.

Crack—crack!

The tiger never made the spring, but rolled over upon the ground, in the agonies of death.

Another wild shout went up from the crowd, and, quickly turning his horse about, Hanga galloped away from the spot, followed by Jaques Lecairo, who had been an idle witness of the scene.

The two boys rushed forward and assisted the dazed Englishman to rise to his feet.

He was not hurt, beyond a few slight bruises, and, as his horse had been captured by one of the Lakings, he mounted again, saying that he was as good as ever.

The hunt was kept up until nightfall, and about a dozen fine tigers had been slain and skinned.

Then the party went into camp, intending to resume the hunt the next day.

Frank, Sam and Oliver were seated a little distance from the rest, talking of Bolo, who, strange to say, had not been seen for a couple of hours or more.

Frank was just thinking of starting out to hunt him up, when the Zulu made his appearance.

He carried the skin of a freshly-slain tiger over his shoulder, showing that he had not been idle while he had been missing, and, after laying this down, he walked up to Frank, and, placing his lips to the boy's ear, said:

"Brother, I have discovered a wonderful place; it is the gold and diamond mines of the Laking country!"

BRAVE AND BOLD.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAKINGS' MINES.

The boys became deeply interested when Bolo said he had discovered the rich mines of the Laking country.

Zex would never tell Frank where the mines were situated, and apparently did not care to talk upon the subject at all.

But now, as Bolo said he had found them, both Frank and Sam made up their minds that they would visit them.

"How far are the mines from here, Bolo?" asked Frank, when the Zulu had eaten his supper and seated himself by them.

"Not over five miles, my brother; they lay about north of us. While on the hunt, I became lost from the rest of the party, and came upon them before I knew it."

"How did you find out that they were the mines?" asked Sam.

"Because, my brother, I saw both gold and diamonds there. It is a very strange place, and does not seem natural at all; for, while the gold shines through the dirt on the hillsides, the diamonds are placed in little jars and are hidden in holes. I have a handful about my person, but dare not show them now, for fear the Lakings might become angry and slay us. The mines are not very large, my brothers, but they are, indeed, wonderful. We must all go through them."

Zex now came up, and all further private conversation was stopped.

After talking over the day's hunt, and what might be expected on the morrow, numerous fires were built about the camp, to keep away prowling beasts, and all save the guards turned in to sleep.

They were up the next morning with the sun, however, and the hunt for tigers was again resumed.

Frank and Sam were very successful, and before noon they had each slain one of the beasts without any assistance from anybody.

The jungle at this point seemed to be alive with tigers, and it was surprising to the boys where they all came from.

About noon the two boys and the Zulu managed to get out of the sight of the rest of the hunters, and, urging up their horses, started in the direction Bolo said the mines were.

It did not take them very long to find the place, and presently they came to a halt on a sandy hill in a wild, isolated spot, surrounded on all sides by a thick, almost impenetrable forest.

"Here is the place, my brothers!" exclaimed the Zulu. "You can hardly call it the mines, yet you will find it a very rich spot, or I know not what I am saying."

Dismounting, they tethered their horses hard by, and began examining the spot.

On the side of the hill, at different points, bright yellow streaks of virgin gold could be plainly seen, and as they kicked the yielding dirt aside, the sun flashed upon it with such extraordinary brilliancy that it fairly dazzled their eyes.

When they had feasted upon the sight for about a quarter of an hour, Bolo started down the hillside and said:

"Come; you will now see the diamonds, my brothers."

They followed him to a hollow square of sandy, arid soil, and as he pointed to the ground, saw numerous little cavities containing small earthen vessels.

Seizing one of these, Frank tore off the covering.

It was filled with precious stones.

"It is strange!" mused Sam, when they had feasted upon the vessel's contents until they were tired. "How is it that the Lakings leave these things here undisturbed?"

"I don't know," replied Frank, "unless they hold this spot as sacred ground. Ah! what is this?"

He paused at the mouth of a small opening in the ground as he spoke, and, dropping upon his knees, peered in.

A flight of roughly-hewn stone steps met his gaze, which apparently led downward for many feet.

"Bolo, you may call this place the mines, after all!" exclaimed he, rising to his feet. "There is a flight of steps here that lead down into the bowels of the earth. What do you say if we go down a little way?"

"I am willing, to be sure," quickly replied Sam. "Lead on."

"We had better not, my brothers," said the Zulu, with a slight show of fear. "I feel that we are on forbidden ground, for, if not, why is all this riches lying scattered about here undisturbed? No good will come of our coming here, I am sure. I wish now that I had not said anything about my discovery. Let us leave here and return to the hunters."

"Not by a jugful!" exclaimed Frank. "You may leave, if you wish, but I am going down these steps to see what is below."

Then Bolo grew eloquent in his appeal for them to come away from the spot.

"Hear, oh, hear me, my brothers!" said he. "We are standing upon the brink of the grave, and soon, if we do not turn back, we will be swallowed up into nothingness; our bodies will disappear, and our spirits will never rest. Come away, I implore you! Oh, come away!"

But neither of the boys heard what he said. They had already disappeared in the hole, and were descending the stone steps.

Once more did the Zulu frantically call them to turn back, and then, becoming horrified at some strange, superstitious feeling which had come over him, he sat down upon the ground, and began to chant in his own language.

For fully ten minutes he kept it up, and then, slowly rising to his feet, he began to shake and quiver like an aspen.

Making one more effort, he threw off the strange feeling that was upon him and thrust his head down the opening.

"Come back!" he shouted; "come back!"

But only the echo of his own voice came to his ears.

"They may stay, but I must leave," he muttered. "There is something wrong about this place."

He attempted to rise to his feet again, when two pairs of hands grabbed him suddenly from behind, and he was thrown on his back upon the ground.

He beheld the evil faces of Hanga and Jaques Lecairo glaring upon him.

CHAPTER XX.

HANGA'S THREAT.

A vengeful light gleamed in Hanga's eyes as he surveyed the fallen Zulu, and he began speaking slowly in his own language.

Meanwhile, Jaques Lecairo kept Bolo covered with his revolver, a sardonic smile on his face.

Hanga could speak a little English, and when he had finished what he was saying in the Laking tongue, he said:

"The three dogs of a strange land have sealed their own doom. They have trespassed upon the burial ground of our noble ancestors, because of the riches that are scattered about; the two baby-faced boys have entered the tomb out of curiosity, and they will never come out again. You, dog of a black man, must go down with them and share their fate! When the solare hears of this act, she will applaud me for sealing your doom. This ground, and everything in it and upon it, is sacred; I have finished what I have to say. Get up and go down the steps in the hole!"

Without a word in reply, Bolo slowly got upon his feet, and

then, not making the least effort to fight it out with the two villains, did exactly as he was directed.

He had felt that no good would come of their visit to the place, and it had come out just as he expected; what was the use of trying to avert the ill luck? That was the Zulu way of it.

As soon as Bolo's head had disappeared down the hole, Hanga scraped aside some loose dirt near its mouth and disclosed a flat slab of stone.

"Catch hold," said he to Jaques Lecairo.

The Frenchman obeyed.

Then, by their united efforts, they overturned it, causing it to fall directly over the opening.

Not satisfied with this, they began piling all the heavy stones they could find on top of the slab.

"There," remarked Hanga, when they had finished their work, "let the dogs die the death they deserve! Come; we must leave here at once; we are on forbidden ground. The vaults below have been used for the burial-places of the royal family for ages. It is wrong for us to tarry here."

"But," interposed the Frenchman, as they mounted their horses to leave, "what of all the gold and diamonds about here?"

"It is worth nothing in this land; the gold, as you call it, has been here since the creation of the world, and the shiny white stones in the jars were placed here centuries ago, because they were deemed as a curse to all mankind. Here they have remained ever since, and it is against our rules to meddle with them."

Lecairo, who did not deign to make a reply, looked about upon the scattered riches with a longing eye.

Hanga must have noticed him, for he quickly said:

"Don't wish any of it were yours; you must not touch it, or even come to this place again. If your desire to gather any of the stuff like that which is here, I will show you, some day, where there is plenty of it."

The next moment they were galloping from the spot.

When they returned to the tiger-hunting grounds, the hunt was about over.

About fifty skins had been secured, and, packing these upon their horses, they were ready to start for the village.

Oliver Looney was alarmed at the protracted absence of his friends, and he began searching high and low for them.

Zex also began to grow a little anxious, but he thought that probably the missing ones had got tired of the hunt and gone on back ahead of them.

It was after dark when they arrived at the village, and inquiries in regard to Frank, Sam and the Zulu were at once made by Oliver and Zex.

But, of course, they had not returned, as the reader already knows.

But there was somebody else in the Laking village who was alarmed over the disappearance of the boys and their black servant.

It was no other person than Alare, the daughter of the queen.

She had allowed herself to grow very much interested in Frank Lowe, though she had tried to throw all thoughts of him one side.

He was young and good-looking, and was such a brave and intelligent boy that the girl found that she was really in love with him.

She knew that she ought not to allow herself to do this, but the more she strove to beat the feeling back the stronger it became.

Alare was above the average of her race in intelligence and imagination, and as soon as she found how real her interest in

Frank was she began to puzzle herself as to the reason of his not turning up with the rest of the tiger hunters.

While she was yet thinking on the subject, her persistent suitor, Hanga, came in.

Alare almost hated this man, but he was the choice of her mother, and hitherto she had been resigned to a marriage with him as soon as she became a little older.

But since she had met Frank Lowe she had begun to realize that such a marriage would never result happily to her, and she had even asked her mother to break it up.

But no! The queen would not hear to any such thing; Hanga had noble blood in his veins, was brave and handsome, and she was a mere child.

As the evil young Laking reached the presence of the beautiful girl, he at once began pressing his suit, and urged her to a speedy marriage.

But Alare did not appear to hear him; without answering, she began plying him with questions regarding the missing boys and their Zulu servant.

At this, Hanga's brow darkened like a thundercloud, and he uttered such an oath that Alare drew from him in horror.

"They will never come back!" he exclaimed, venomously. "If you have fallen in love with one of those baby-faced strangers, you may as well give him up, for they walked into their own graves. And let me tell you, Alare, if you don't agree to marry me within fourteen days, something will happen that will change everything in Laking land. The people are not suited with the present mode of government, anyway, and it requires but a spark from me to set the whole thing in a blaze. The majority of them are tired of being ruled by a woman, and I have been requested to proclaim myself as king, and lead them on to a better form of government. This can all be averted if you will take me for a husband. Think well over it; I will call to-morrow for your answer."

With these impressive words, the Laking strode from the room, with haughty mien, and sought the companionship of Jaques Lecairo in his own house.

Poor Alare! Hanga's words cut her like a knife, for she felt that he could surely do what he said if he so desired, and that he certainly would do it should she refuse to become his wife, she well knew.

There was but one person that she knew of who could help her out of the difficulty, and that was the boy who had so bravely leaped into the dark chasm at her command.

She felt that she could depend upon him; but where was he? That was the question.

A thought struck the girl. She would find him, if he was in the land of the living.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE VAULTS.

Down the stone steps went Frank and Sam, until it became so dark beneath them that they could no longer see their way.

For fear they would step in some unseen pit, and fall to their death, they came to a halt.

Frank lit a match, and held it before them.

By the aid of the flickering light, they saw that a few more steps would fetch them to the bottom.

A moment more and they had finished the descent.

"Now," remarked Sam, as the match went out, "if we only had a torch, we might be able to make some discoveries."

Frank produced another match and struck it.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Here is the very thing!"

BRAVE AND BOLD.

Leaning against the flat, rocky wall was a piece of resinous wood, which plainly showed evidences of having been used as a torch before.

In a moment Sam had coaxed the charred end to kindle in a blaze, and then they were fully equipped to explore the underground place.

The chamber they were in was about fifty feet below the surface of the ground, and branched off in a half dozen different galleries.

The boys were now worked up to an exciting pitch, and, torch in hand, Frank led the way through the widest passage.

As they entered it, a strong, pungent odor filled their nostrils.

"I wonder what that is?" remarked Sam.

"I don't know," replied his companion; "it don't smell bad, and yet I can't say that it is pleasant. We will find out presently, no doubt. Ah! here is a vault."

"Yes," said Sam, quickly, "and a burial vault, too. Look at the coffins."

After hesitating a moment, they entered the vault and began making a survey of its contents.

On either side were a number of boxes, greatly resembling coffins of modern manufacture.

As they drew near them, they discovered that there were no lids attached to them.

"Mummies, by Jove!" exclaimed Frank.

Yes, they were mummies, sure enough; and, as the torch was placed near one of them, the wrinkled, leather-looking face seemed to smile upon them in a ghastly manner.

"A queer place, this," remarked Sam; "I don't half like it; let's get out."

"All right," returned Frank. "This seems to be an ancient burial vault. We have no right here, and I don't mean to disturb anything."

They were just turning to leave the vault, when a footfall sounded, and Bolo appeared in the doorway.

Both boys gazed at him in surprise.

In a few words, the Zulu related all that had happened.

A look of pallor came over the faces of Frank and Sam.

"We must get out of here at once!" exclaimed Frank, starting toward the stairs at a brisk pace.

Sam hastened after him, but Bolo took his time, and came along with his head down, in a meditative way.

As soon as the two young adventurers reached the foot of the stairs they began rapidly ascending them.

They held their revolvers ready for instant use, thinking that Hanga and the Frenchman would be standing at the opening, ready to give them battle.

But it did not take them long to discover that the entrance was blocked.

Making a mighty effort, they attempted to remove the heavy stone slab.

But they might as well have undertaken to move a brick house.

After vainly trying it three or four times, they sat down upon the steps to speculate over their situation.

Presently the Zulu came up and joined them.

"My brothers, we are doomed," said he, quietly. "We may as well go down to one of the vaults, choose the spot we desire to lie upon, and await the coming of death."

"Bolo, are you crazy?" asked Frank, sharply. "Do you think I am going to give up right away? Not much! If there is any living chance to get out of here, we must find it."

"Let us go down and hunt through the different galleries; maybe there is another way out of here."

Without making any reply, Sam and Bolo followed him down the steps again.

More torches were found, so they decided that each should enter a separate passage, explore it, and then come back and report at the starting point.

The one Frank took was a rather long one, but it ended in a vault, exactly as the one they had been in before had done.

It was filled with the same sort of death relics, and was just as loathsome and uninviting.

With a heavy heart, Frank slowly made his way back.

Sam was already at the starting point, and one look at his dejected face showed plainly that he had met with the same luck.

The two boys felt gloomy enough, and, seating themselves upon the rocky floor, they awaited the return of Bolo.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes slipped by, and he did not show up yet.

What was the matter? Had he discovered a way out? Or was the passage he had taken longer than the others?

They thought that the latter was probably the case, and so waited a little longer.

Half an hour passed, and no signs of the Zulu yet.

Frank and Sam arose to their feet.

There were two passages that had not been explored as yet. Maybe he had returned before either of them, and had started along one of them.

They concluded to try them, and each entered one.

In ten minutes both came back, with the same result as before—and no signs of the Zulu yet!

CHAPTER XXII.

ALARE'S BRAVE ACTION.

Alare had no sooner made up her mind to try and find Frank Lowe and his companions than she started to act.

Leaving her room in the royal palace—or whatever it might be called—she proceeded cautiously outside, and then made her way to the place where the horses were kept.

Among her other accomplishments Alare was a superb rider, and she had a horse as black as midnight for her own especial use.

This steed was as pretty as a picture, and as swift as an arrow, notwithstanding the fact that he was as gentle as a young lamb, and loved his mistress as a child might have done.

She reached the stable where her horse was kept, and managed to lead him forth without being discovered by the man who was watching the place.

In the twinkling of an eye she had mounted, and then guiding her steed until she reached the outskirts of the village, she came to a halt.

Which way should she go? That was the question.

Suddenly a thought struck her, and she gave a start.

Hanga said that the three who were missing had walked into their own graves.

The burial vaults! They must have entered them, not knowing what they were.

Alare shuddered. She knew that it was a sacrilege for any one to venture there unless it was the bearers who conveyed the body of one of the royal family to their last resting place.

What if they had discovered this place, and out of curiosity entered it?

It did not take the girl long to conjecture this theory of the case, so, without further ado, she turned her horse's head in the direction of the sacred spot.

The journey was a perilous one for a man, let alone a delicate

young girl. But Alare did not notice the growls and screams of the wild beasts, but kept steadily on her way.

It was about midnight when she arrived in sight of the desolate-appearing spot.

She was now at a loss as to where the entrance to the vaults could be found, and, dismounting, she began to search about for it.

Suddenly she heard a whinny close at hand, which was immediately answered by her horse.

A light broke over her countenance, and, quickly proceeding in the direction the sound came from, she saw three steeds tethered to a tree.

"Ah!" she exclaimed; "these are the animals they rode. They must certainly be here."

She passed the pile of stones Hanga and the villainous Frenchman had placed upon the slab that covered the hole at least half a dozen times. But it did not once strike her that this had anything to do with what she was looking for.

However, after a fruitless search, her eyes once more rested upon the pile, and then for the first time she examined it.

In a moment she saw that they had been recently placed there, for fresh soil was still clinging to some of them.

"Ah!" she exclaimed; "why did I not think of this before? This is the entrance, beyond a doubt. Hanga closed it, and then piled up these stones to hide all traces of it. I will remove them and find out."

The next moment she was at work rolling the stones aside.

Some of them were very heavy, and it was extremely hard work for her delicate hands.

But she kept on, and presently had them removed, so the slab showed up plainly before her.

The most difficult part of her task was now before her, and for a minute or two she knew not what to do.

A glance showed her that she would never be able to remove the slab unaided.

While she was studying the matter over, an idea struck her.

Picking up one of the smaller stones, she began pounding upon the slab with all her might.

Half a minute of this sort of work, and she paused to listen.

But not a sound from within was heard.

Again she resumed the pounding.

This time when she ceased she heard a faint call from somewhere beneath her.

Alare's heart gave a bound.

The ones she was in search of were really in the vaults, after all.

She beat upon the slab, to let them know she heard them, and then awaited developments.

Presently she heard the sounds of some one ascending the steps, and then a voice, which she recognized as Frank's, called out:

"Who is there? Have you come to let us out?"

"It is me—Alare!" she answered. "I have come to let you out. Press upward against the slab—I cannot remove it alone."

A smothered cry of joy was heard from beneath the slab, and the next instant it was raised a few inches.

At that moment a shriek of mortal agony rang out from the vaults below, and the slab fell back in its place with a bang, leaving Alare standing in terror on the outside.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK TO THE VILLAGE.

Frank and Sam stared at each other when they saw that Bolo had not returned yet.

"I wonder what is the matter—what keeps him so long?" said Frank. "Could he really have found a way out of here and gone and left us?"

"It is rather strange," replied Sam. "This is the passage he took when we all three started; suppose we follow it up, and see if we can find him?"

"A good idea; come on."

Torch in hand, they started down the passage.

In less than five minutes they found that it ended exactly like the others—in a vault filled with mummies.

But Bolo was nowhere to be found!

The more the boys thought over the matter, the more puzzled they became.

The air in the place seemed to be comparatively good, though it was strongly infused with the pungent odor they had noticed on entering the first vault.

Just now it seemed to have a mystic soothing influence over them.

Presently all their fear apparently vanished, and both began to yawn.

Soon they were in a sound sleep.

At length they were awakened by hearing a pounding noise above them.

It sounded as though some one was beating upon the heavy slab that was between them and liberty.

With wildly beating hearts, they rushed up the steps.

Then it was that Frank asked who was there, and found it was Alare.

As she finished speaking, they placed their shoulders against the slab and raised it up.

Just then they heard the wild shriek coming from the vaults below.

So startled were they that they allowed the stone slab to fall back.

What could it mean, anyhow?

Each asked himself the question.

Before they could form any further conclusion, they detected a torchlight at the foot of the stairs.

They strained their eyes to see what would follow.

A moment more, and they discerned the form of Bolo coming slowly up.

But how changed was his appearance! His eyes shone with a strange, unnatural light, and he was rolling his head from side to side, as a mad bull might have done.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Frank. "He's crazy!"

The boy was right.

The Zulu had certainly lost his head, and now was in a very frenzied condition.

He did not seem to notice the two boys at the head of the stairs, but kept on coming up, waving his torch about in an alarming manner.

When halfway up the steps, the Zulu suddenly paused.

Then, uttering a wild, maniacal yell, he seized his knife and plunged it in his heart.

For one single instant he wavered in his tracks, and then went crashing to the bottom of the steps—a corpse.

The boys uttered a simultaneous cry at the horrible sight; then, making one mighty effort, they dashed the stone slab aside.

The next moment they had sprung outside in the moonlight.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

Alare stood before them; but she started back, with a low cry, at their sudden appearance.

Forgetting all about his last meeting with her, Frank had seized her by the hand the next moment, and was thanking her warmly.

After he had introduced Sam, he explained who it was who made the wild shrieks which had frightened her so.

"Come," she said, after a pause, "we must leave this place at once. Our horses are hitched over yonder, near a running stream. Mount, and let us be off; I have something to say to you on the way home."

In an exceedingly short space of time the boys had reached their horses, and, after mounting, Sam took the bridle rein of the steed the ill-fated Zulu had rode, and they were ready to start.

Alare rode up, and, placing herself at the side of Frank, they started on the journey back to the village, which they hoped to reach before daylight.

On the way, Alare told Frank all about her interview with Hanga, saying also that she expected he would put his threat in execution, especially when he saw that the ones he had doomed to die had made their escape.

"Well," said Frank, after he had thought a while, "you may count on Sam, Oliver Looney and myself to go on your side—poor Bolo! If he was not dead, he would also be a big help in a case of this kind. But you must first tell your mother all about it. If she sanctions it, I think there will be but little trouble for us to put down any rebellion that may be made."

"I will tell my mother all about it before I sleep again," was the reply.

Frank explained the situation to Sam as they rode along, and that youth seemed to be pleased rather than otherwise at the outlook.

"It will make a little excitement," said he, "and the government will be all the stronger for it when it is all over."

When the three riders reached the outskirts of the village, the first gray streaks of the coming day became visible in the east.

Apparently, no one had yet arisen in the village, and they managed to reach the house that had been allotted to our friends without being observed.

Sam stopped here, but Frank went on with Alare.

He wanted to be sure that she got to her house in safety.

In a few minutes they reached the stables, and the horses were put away; then they started on foot for the royal palace, which was but a hundred yards away.

By this time it was growing quite light, and, as the two halted almost at the doorway of the house, Alare reached out her hand, and said:

"Here, Frank, you may touch your lips to my hand, if you wish. Things are altogether different now, and, besides, I want to learn the customs of your people, who are a great way above us, I am sure."

Frank did not let the golden opportunity slip, but kissed the beautiful girl's hand in a reverent manner.

To him she was the most beautiful creature in the world, and, young as he was, he had fallen in love.

There is no telling but that he would have declared it then and there had not something extraordinary taken place.

Even while he held her shapely hand in his own, gazing into her lustrous, dark eyes in the dull gray of the early morning, he detected a footfall behind him.

Drawing his revolver from his belt, he turned as quick as a flash.

The figure of a man stood before him, and a single glance showed him that it was Hanga.

Alare gave a sudden scream of dismay, and clung to the boy for protection.

A sardonic smile came over the face of Hanga; and then he exclaimed, in his own tongue:

"Treachery! Seize them, men! The solare's daughter has violated the laws of our country!"

The next instant a dozen Laking men sprang into the light, and rushed upon Frank and his fair charge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REBELLION BEGINS.

Frank pushed Alare behind him, to shield her from the advancing Lakings, and then, leveling his revolver, exclaimed:

"Stop! The man who advances a step nearer dies!"

But the command was not heeded; the next moment his weapon spoke, and one of them fell to the ground.

Crack! crack!

Fire flashed from the muzzle of the deadly tube twice more, and two more dropped, uttering howls of agony.

The remainder fled in wild dismay, and Hanga followed them, his face as white as a sheet.

Alare had fainted, and, lifting her tenderly in his arms, Frank bore her to the door of the house.

At that moment the queen put in an appearance, in wild alarm, followed by half a dozen of her servants.

"What means this?" she asked, addressing Frank in English.

And then, as her eyes rested on the three dead Lakings:

"What, in the name of the Great Unknown, has happened?"

"It means, your majesty," replied the boy, as coolly as possible under the circumstances, "that Hanga has started a rebellion against the throne; ask me no more. Alare will tell you all, as soon as she comes to from her fainting spell. In the meantime, if you will take my advice, you had better call together all your loyal subjects, without a moment's delay; there is trouble ahead."

Without waiting to see the effect of his words, Frank quickly left the spot and started for his own house.

He reached it without seeing a sign of Hanga or any of those who had made the attack on him.

Sam, who had not gone to sleep, stood in the doorway, awaiting his appearance.

In a hurried manner, Frank related what had occurred, and then told Sam to run over to Oliver Looney's residence and bring him and his wife to their house.

Sam departed on his errand, and then, after securing the door firmly, Frank set about getting something to eat.

He had barely commenced, when he heard loud cries and the tramping of horses' feet outside.

Rushing to the door, he unbarred it, and looked out.

Two mounted men were dashing through the crooked streets of the village in full speed, crying out something in their own language in a very excited manner.

Just as they disappeared behind a clump of the gaudily-painted houses, another horseman appeared on the scene.

Frank gave a start of surprise.

It was Jaques Lecairo!

The Frenchman held his rifle in readiness, as though waiting to get a shot at the ones he was in pursuit of.

In a moment he was lost to view, and then the report of a rifle rang out.

Almost at the same instant a sound like the beating of drums came from a point just outside the village.

In less than ten minutes the utmost confusion prevailed in the place.

Men, women and children began rushing wildly about the streets, some going in the direction the beating sound came from, and others toward the solare's palace.

"The rebellion has begun," muttered Frank; "I must be one of the first to take a hand in it. Those two horsemen were, no doubt, sent out by the queen to warn the people of Hanga's intention. This thing has evidently been a long while pending, and through my hurrying it a little has broken out at last. We will now see who has the most friends—the queen or Hanga."

To Frank the scene appeared more like a drama upon the stage than anything else. The queerly-attired men and women of a race unknown to the world presented such a fantastic sight, as they rushed about hither and thither in their excitement, and seemed to be so unreal, that for a time he could scarcely comprehend that he was not dreaming.

But he was soon brought to his senses, however, by seeing Sam and Oliver Looney and his wife coming hurriedly toward him through the crowd.

"Come in," said Frank, "and guard the house till I come back. I am going to the palace, to speak with the queen, if I can, to see what action she is going to take."

"All right," replied Sam, "go ahead. I'll guarantee that we will hold our own until you get back."

After seeing that his weapons were ready for instant use, Frank set out on his errand.

He soon reached the palace, and was at once ushered into the queen's presence.

She seemed to be very glad to see him, and, after the usual formalities had been gone through with, said:

"I will come to the point at once in what I have to say. Our government, which has existed for many years, is in danger of being overthrown; Alare tells me that you, though young in years, have a thorough knowledge of warfare. She also openly avows to me that she loves you, and desires to marry you. If this is pleasing news to you, take charge of this campaign, and save the Laking country from ruin. What is your reply to this?"

Frank was not slow in answering.

"Your majesty," said he, "I will gladly do this. All that I ask is that you place me in full charge of your men; if you will do this, I will guarantee to settle the disturbance in a few days."

"Certainly," was the reply; "you may consider yourself in charge at once. Zex will take what orders you may give and translate them to our people. And now, one question before you proceed. I have said that Alare has declared that she loves you. Are you willing to take her for a bride when you have gained a victory for me and saved the government?"

"Yes," returned he, quietly, "I will."

Then, making a salute, he left the queen's presence, motioning Zex to follow him.

Then he started in on the task he had undertaken. The loyal ones amounted to a little over nine hundred men, against Hanga's two thousand.

Frank had read considerable about warfare, and he intended to conduct this campaign on the same basis that a great general had been successful in.

In the first place, he marshaled all his forces near the royal palace, and then set to work in drilling them.

Sam and Oliver, of course, came inside the lines with the rest of the loyal ones, and they were appointed to very important positions in the small army.

But Hanga and Jaques Lecairo were not idle all this time.

They, too, were drilling their men, and it looked as though our friends had no easy task before them.

CHAPTER XXV.

SAM AS A SCOUT.

Two days passed.

Hanga had not begun the attack yet. The queen was growing more nervous every hour, and at length she sent for Frank, and asked his opinion of the delay.

He at once gave her his idea of it.

"Hanga has a shrewd villain on his side—the Frenchman, you know—and he is acting on his advice. The attack will not be made until they have the men in some sort of discipline so they can manage them," said he.

"They outnumber us two to one," remarked her majesty, in a doubtful tone.

"I know they do. But we also outnumber them three to one, as far as rifles are concerned; and they are the weapons that will settle the business."

Her mind was somewhat eased at this, and Frank withdrew.

He had divided his men in four regiments, or whatever they might be called, and each was led by a worthy person.

He took charge of one himself; Sam acted in the same capacity for another, and Oliver and Zex commanded the remaining two.

The Lakings were very quick to learn, and in the two days they had been drilling they had made rapid strides in the tactics Frank put forth.

Frank could easily see what Hanga was doing from his position, and he noticed that Jaques Lecairo was drilling the men almost incessantly.

As the day slipped by, and darkness came on, he concluded to send out a scout, to learn, if possible, the exact intentions of the enemy.

On second thought, he concluded to send two—Sam and one of the Lakings.

Of course, Sam was willing to undertake the job, and it was no trouble at all to get one of the Lakings to go with him, so they at once set out.

Cautioning his companion to be as careful as possible, Sam led the way, going by a roundabout course through a belt of timber on the south side of the village.

By going this way, the distance was not very great, and in less than half an hour they were within pistol shot of the enemy's camp.

A double line of guards was placed around it, and, observing this, Sam hesitated about going any closer.

But his companion volunteered to steal a little nearer, and endeavor to glean something by listening to the conversation of the guards.

"Go ahead," said Sam, "and I will wait here till you come back."

The Laking got as close to the ground as possible, and began crawling along in a very stealthy manner.

In a minute he had disappeared in the shrubbery.

With his hand upon the butt of his revolver, Sam prepared to await his return.

Five minutes slipped by.

The boy began to grow just the least bit uncomfortable.

Had he done the right thing in letting the Laking venture nearer the lines of the enemy?

He was beginning to think that he had not, when he detected a slight movement among Hanga's followers.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

The next moment a loud cry was heard, and he saw his late companion rushing toward him, with a dozen foes at his heels.

Almost at the same instant he was overpowered from behind and thrown to the ground.

Before he was aware of what had taken place, he was securely bound and hustled away from the spot.

Straight through the lines of the camp he had been watching he was carried, and just as he came to his full senses he was deposited before a brightly burning fire.

It now came to him very forcibly that Hanga's forces were not to be caught napping.

He had been discovered and pounced upon in short order.

In a minute or so the Laking who had accompanied him on his scouting expedition was brought in, also bound securely, and thrown on the ground at his side.

It was Sam's first experience in the rôle of scout, and he made up his mind that he would know what he was doing before he attempted any such business again.

While he was wondering what was going to be done with him, Hanga and Jaques Lecairo came up, and coolly surveyed him.

"Well," asked the Frenchman, with mock politeness, "how do you like your position? You wanted to find out what we were doing; are you satisfied with the result of your tour of inspection?"

"Hardly," returned Sam, with considerable boldness. "You have got the best of me for the present; now the question is, what are you going to do with me?"

"I'll tell you what we are going to do with you," spoke up Hanga. "If the plan I have in view fails to work, you shall be killed by your own iron tube that sends out fire and death!"

Then the two arch villains drew aside and conversed earnestly together, in a low tone, for a few minutes.

Presently they returned, and at once liberated the Laking prisoner, and bade him rise to his feet, much to Sam's surprise.

Hanga then addressed him, in his own tongue, the substance of which was the following:

"Return at once to the solare, and tell her that if she will give me Alare for my wife, and submit to me as the ruler of the Laking country hereafter, and agree to banish the three strangers from this land, after first taking their weapons from them, I will withdraw all further hostilities, and everything shall proceed in peace and harmony. If she refuses, she and all her followers shall be slain before the setting of another sun, and I will wed her daughter by force."

The recipient of this verbal message at once bowed and started for the headquarters of Frank Lowe, thanking his stars that he had gotten off so easily.

As soon as the messenger had departed, Hanga began to examine the weapons taken from Sam, and asked Lecairo to instruct him in their use.

This the Frenchman endeavored to do, but Hanga had scarcely had one of the revolvers in his hand when he accidentally touched the trigger, and it went off, the bullet lodging in his wrist and shattering the bone.

With a howl, he flung the weapon to the ground, and began dancing about like a wild man.

Sam laughed, in spite of his situation, whereupon the wounded man kicked him savagely and began heaping curses upon his head.

Nerved to desperation at the cowardly assault upon his defenseless person, the boy struggled violently, and succeeded in bursting his bonds.

The next moment he had sprung to his feet and seized the revolver.

Then, while Jaques Lecairo looked on in speechless surprise, he struck Hanga a blow between the eyes, sending him over backward into the blazing fire.

Crack!

He leveled the revolver at the Frenchman and pulled the trigger, and then, without waiting to see the result, he dashed away in the darkness, upsetting all who opposed him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SAM FINDS A CAVE.

Away dashed Sam, the astonished Lakings gazing at his retreating form, too much surprised to make a move to intercept him, until finally he was lost in the darkness.

But their legs were shorter than Sam's, and he was a good runner, in the bargain; consequently, he soon outdistanced them.

But the daring boy soon discovered that, instead of drawing nearer to the place where his friends were situated, he was leaving it farther behind him at every step.

"Never mind," muttered he, gritting hard upon his teeth; "so long as I elude Hanga's followers, I shall be satisfied. I will get back to headquarters before morning, without a doubt."

It was dark as pitch, and very difficult traveling, and the farther he made his way, the thicker the jungle seemed to be.

To make matters worse, the sky began to cloud up, and presently drops of rain commenced to fall.

He again set out with renewed vigor; he did not relish the idea of being out in the wet long, even if he was in a warm climate.

Presently the ground became rocky and uneven, and it began to dawn upon him that he was walking up a gradual ascent.

"I must have struck the mountains," muttered Sam; "I am away off; the queen's palace is five or six miles from here. Well, it is raining so hard I guess I'll crawl in some place and wait till it stops. Anyhow, it is too dark to find my way back to the village."

He had mounted a steep hill, as he was soliloquizing, and in a moment he had reached the top.

The next step he took his foot landed on nothing, and before he knew it he was sliding down an incline at the rate of a mile a minute.

There was clattering of stones and dirt, then he brought up with a slight jar.

After he had regained his feet, he produced a match, and, with considerable difficulty struck it, and peered around, to see what sort of a place he had landed in.

Sam was unable to distinguish much during the brief moment the sulphur flamed up, but he saw enough to convince him that he was in a sort of gully, through the center of which flowed a stream of water.

A little to the right of him was a cave, and toward this the boy now felt his way.

In less than a minute he reached the mouth of the cave, and then, lighting another match, to make sure that it was empty, he peered in.

It seemed to run back a considerable distance, and, with the exception of several bunches of dried moss, it appeared to be empty.

The moss gave Sam an idea; picking up a handful of it, he placed the lighted match to it, to see if it would burn.

It did, sure enough, and then without any further ado he scraped up a good-sized heap, and soon had a brightly-burning fire.

"This isn't so very bad, after all," he muttered; "I can dry my

clothes, at any rate; and, besides, the fire feels good, for the air is very chilly."

There was plenty of moss in the cave, and, as it did not seem to be consumed very quickly, Sam reckoned that there was enough of it to keep the fire blazing all night.

Seating himself before the fire, Sam proceeded to dry his wet clothing, and make himself as comfortable as possible.

He was completely tired out from what he had undergone since he had started on his scouting expedition, and presently he became very drowsy.

Then he began to nod.

Five minutes later, and his chin had dropped upon his breast, and he was sound asleep.

He must have slumbered in this manner at least an hour, when he awoke with a start.

He plainly detected a hissing noise, like the sound of escaping steam.

What could it mean?

Sam asked himself this question, and then threw some more moss upon the fire, which had nearly died out.

Twisting a bunch of the moss into the form of a torch, he lighted it, and then proceeded to the rear part of the cave.

The hissing became more intense the nearer he proceeded in that direction, and presently he halted, feeling that he was close upon the spot where the noise proceeded from.

A solid bank of clay was before him, and, moving his torch along the face of it, he endeavored to find out the cause of the strange sound.

"It's funny," he mused, as he approached a little nearer. "I can't imagine what—"

The rest of Sam's sentence remained unfinished, for at that instant there was a blinding flash, followed by a deafening report, and he was flung violently to the ground.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HANGA MAKES THE ATTACK.

When the Laking arrived at the solare's headquarters with the message Hanga had sent, her majesty became almost furious, and declared that she would never consent to any such proposal.

Frank and Oliver grew very nervous when they heard that Sam was a prisoner in the hands of Hanga and Jaques Lecairo.

At first Frank was for attacking their foes at once, and endeavor to rescue him; but, on second thought, he concluded that it would be better to use a little strategy.

He knew full well that unless Hanga received an answer from the queen at once, he would, in all probability, begin the attack.

But he was all ready for it, however, and in a very uneasy frame of mind he prepared to watch the long night away.

When the rain that Sam had been out in came up, and the darkness grew intense, the Lakings soldiers began to grow restless, and endeavored to pierce the inky darkness, as if in anticipation of the enemy's approach.

Zex said that this was the case, and he himself feared that the bad Frenchman might put it in Hanga's head to make the attack during the night.

"Why, don't you like to fight in the night?" asked Frank.

"No," was the reply. "Who does? And, besides, our people have never been known to do it. If they had any differences to settle, it has always been done in the light of day."

"If that is the case, then, we won't be attacked to-night, Zex."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because Hanga will not allow his men to fight in the dark, when they have never been used to doing it. He, no doubt, places

a great deal of confidence in Jaques Lecairo, but he will not be led into anything that is against the desire of his followers. Depend upon it, we won't see anything of them before daylight."

Zex appeared to feel considerably easier at Frank's words, and the boy himself felt so confident in his prediction that he sought his bed, to get a few hours' sleep before the battle would begin.

The long night wore slowly away, the rain falling steadily until half an hour before daybreak, when it cleared.

Frank arose before the sun, and, when it began to grow a little light, he climbed a tree, to take an observation upon the camp of the enemy.

He saw a sight that made his pulse quicken, and caused the blood to flow faster through his veins.

Hanga's forces were just leaving their camp, and were marching, like well-trained soldiers, toward the solare's adherents.

Quickly descending the tree, Frank gave his orders to Zex, in a collected matter, and soon all was bustle and confusion among the loyal Lakings.

Their voices, as they talked together about the coming battle, sounded like the hum from a hive of bees, only on a larger scale.

But in ten minutes' time the most perfect order prevailed among them, and they coolly awaited the approach of their foes, whom all now could plainly see.

As soon as Hanga saw that his advance was observed, he gave an order, and presently the noise of half a hundred drum-like instruments rang out.

This was answered almost immediately in the same manner by Frank's forces, to show that they were defiant, and not afraid to meet their foes.

There was a large, open square near the solare's palace, and when within fifty yards of this Hanga's men spread out like a fan, in two separate companies, one about two hundred feet behind the other.

The square was evidently the spot chosen for the battle-ground, and Frank gave the order to march out and meet the enemy.

Nearly every horse in the village was in the hands of the loyal ones, and all that they had were now put in use.

Frank possessed a manly, handsome appearance as he rode out at the head of his men to engage in the battle.

He also held half of his forces in reserve.

These were under the charge of Oliver Looney, and after the first rush had been made he was to follow up the advantage gained—if any—and endeavor to rout the enemy.

Frank strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of Jaques Lecairo, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Strange!" muttered the boy. "I wonder if he is up to something by keeping out of sight? Well, never mind; we have got to beat those fellows, and do it quickly, too. If anything has happened to the Frenchman so that he will be unable to take part in the fight, we shall have an easy time of it, I'm thinking."

Frank was a little cautious about approaching too near the enemy. He thought that probably Jaques Lecairo might be concealing himself somewhere, waiting to get a shot at him.

But the fight had to commence now, and when the two opposing lines faced each other, with but fifty feet of level ground between them, he gave the order to charge.

Almost at the same moment Hanga gave a like command, and then, like a mighty rush of wind, they dashed toward each other.

Just before they met, Frank began emptying the contents of his rifle into the ranks of the rebels, killing a man at every shot.

He now became convinced that something must have happened to the Frenchman, as not a single answering shot came back.

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The boy's action served to create dire confusion in the ranks of the rebels, but Hanga urged them on, and then:

Clash!

The spears of the contending parties met.

For the space of a minute neither side wavered, and then the enemy's line broke, and Frank's men rushed among them.

Wherever he saw a strong point in the opposing force, Frank would send half a dozen shots.

This would invariably cause them to break and retreat a little.

Soon the entire front line began to fall back, and, becoming alarmed, Hanga called upon the reserved force to fall in.

Frank sent a hasty message to Oliver and Zex, and presently half of his reserve came sweeping down upon the fighting grounds, with Zex at their head.

The other half, under the command of the Englishman, began making a detour, with the intention of flanking the enemy on the left.

When the next charge was made, Frank was past the center of the square, and a confident smile came over his handsome, boyish face. He was gaining ground, and he felt elated over it.

This time, owing to their superior numbers, Hanga's men did not give an inch.

Frank poured out his leaden hail with terrible effect, but as fast as one man fell another took his place.

Rendered furious at the sight of the men falling around them, each side rushed at the other with renewed force, lunging their keen spears and shouting like madmen.

Hanga's men were just on the point of wavering again, when Oliver, whose movement had not been observed, came rushing down upon them like the wind from a new quarter.

Then it was that the battle was decided.

In five minutes' time, Hanga and his followers fled from the scene, leaving a third of their number dead and dying upon the battlefield.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SAM AND THE FRENCHMAN.

As Sam was thrown to the ground from the force of the explosion, his senses left him.

It was some time before he came to, and when he did so a strong smell of gas pervaded the cave, and he felt so dizzy that it was with difficulty that he managed to rise to his feet.

"Great guns!" he ejaculated. "I wonder what has happened, anyhow!"

As soon as he regained the full possession of his wits, he began to look about him.

A single glance showed him that a part of the wall of earth where the hissing sound had come from had entirely disappeared, and a black opening showed up instead.

"Another new discovery," muttered Sam. "Well, I will certainly see what it amounts to. That sound I heard was, no doubt, gas escaping from a natural well. When I placed the torch near it to find out what it meant, it exploded, and nearly ended my career. I guess there is no further danger now, so I will light up again, and see what kind of a place that is next door."

Suiting the action to the words, he twisted up another bunch of the moss and lighted it from the still smoldering fire near the cave's mouth.

Then, holding it so it would throw the light as far ahead of him as possible, he started boldly through the break the explosion had caused.

At first he could see nothing but black-looking walls of stone on either side of him, but as his eyes gradually became accus-

tomed to the light, he detected the glimmer of a running stream, which flowed through the center of the sandy floor of the place.

That there must be an opening overhead, Sam felt certain, for he could plainly feel the rain descending upon his head from the outside.

"It is funny where the gas came from," he mused. "Since I came in here I can't smell it at all. I want to find that out first, and then I'll examine the place farther."

He retraced his steps a little way, until he came to the spot where the earth had given way.

Here he again detected the odor of gas.

A little to his right was an opening of about two feet in diameter, from which the fumes came.

Sam thought a moment, and then concluded to wait until daylight before he made any further investigation. He was afraid his lighted torch might cause another explosion.

Extinguishing it, he made his way to the mouth of the cave.

After selecting as soft a spot as possible, he lay down to rest till morning.

Sam was tired, and, in spite of his rough surroundings, he slept soundly.

When he awoke it had ceased raining, and the sun was shining brightly in the mouth of the cave.

He arose to his feet, feeling quite stiff and sore, but this gradually worked off as he began moving about.

He made his way at once to the spot where the gas had exploded the night before.

He could still smell the fumes, but, not minding this, he advanced through the break into the other cave.

A rift in the rocky roof let the sun in, and it was almost as light as it was outside in the canyon.

"A queer place, this," muttered Sam, as he advanced to the stream and peered into its depths. "I wonder where this water runs to?"

At that moment he was startled by hearing a footfall behind him.

Quick as a flash his hand was upon his revolver, and he had turned around.

Sam uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

Before him stood Jaques Lecairo, the Frenchman.

The villain wore a sardonic smile on his face, and in either hand was a revolver, which covered the boy.

"Ha, ha!" he sneered, "so I have found you, have I? You thought your shot killed me, but it did not. Hanga also thought I was dead, but I am worth a dozen dead men yet; the bullet you sent at me grazed the side of my head, and stunned me; but I am ready for you now. The Lakings could not find you, but the trail you left was too plain to fool me."

"Well," said Sam, recovering somewhat from his surprise, "since you have found me, what are you going to do about it?"

"What am I going to do about it? You will find out too soon, young man. You deliberately tried to kill me in Hanga's camp; I am going to kill you!"

The two were not more than ten feet from each other.

Sam stood in the same position that he had been in when he discovered the intruder, with his left foot advanced, and his right hand grasping his revolver, the muzzle of which was turned toward the ground.

Both of Lecairo's revolvers were leveled directly at Sam's breast, and his fingers were upon the triggers, ready to send their deadly contents into the human target.

Sam well knew that the least sort of aggressive movement he made would most likely seal his doom.

Apparently, the only way to save his life was to get the first shot in himself.

He concluded to try it.

"Lecairo," said he, "I will make a bargain with you."

"What is it?" asked the Frenchman, evincing the least bit of surprise.

"That is it!"

Crack!

It was Sam's revolver that spoke, and, with a gurgling cry, Jaques Lecairo sank to the sandy floor of the cave, his weapons flying from his grasp.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"WE MUST LEAVE TO-NIGHT."

Frank Lowe was very much pleased at the manner in which Hanga's forces had been repulsed, and he waved his hat in the air, and led his men in a hearty cheer for the solare.

But, though Hanga had been repulsed, he was not beaten yet by any means.

His nature was of such a villainous sort that he would never rest until he accomplished what he had undertaken, even if it took a year to do it.

The queen took it for granted that he would give up the idea of rebelling against the throne and ask her pardon, which she concluded to grant.

Alare's eyes sparkled with more than their usual brilliancy when she welcomed Frank after the battle had been fought, and just at that moment the brave boy adventurer was the proudest mortal in the whole world.

The morning slipped by, and at length noon arrived.

Frank and Oliver, who were pacing up and down on the level plain just above the royal palace, noticed a figure coming toward them from the direction of the mountains on the north.

Both gazed for a single instant, and then uttered a simultaneous cry of joy.

It was Sam Singleby who was approaching, beyond a doubt.

The shot he had fired in the cave had struck Jaques Lecairo in a vital part, and the villain had expired almost immediately.

Leaving the body of the victim of a misspent life where it had fallen, Sam struck out to return to the Laking village.

After about an hour he sighted it, and then, with all possible speed, he hastened to meet his friends.

As soon as Frank and Oliver saw him they waved their hats and rushed to meet him.

In as few words as possible, Sam related what had befallen him, after which Frank told him of the recent scrimmage with Hanga, and how the situation was at present.

"Well," said Sam, as they walked along in the direction of the royal palace, "do you want my opinion of things in general?"

Both Frank and Oliver nodded in assent.

"It is just this, then: We must leave this place as soon as possible; get all the diamonds from the mines or burial grounds that we can, and then be off."

Frank shook his head.

"I am afraid you are about right, old fellow," returned he; "but I hate to leave so soon."

"Hi don't care habout hit myself," put in Oliver Looney.

"I understand how it is exactly. There is a woman in the case with both of you. One has just been married, and the other is thinking strongly of doing so. But we must look the situation squarely in the face. Both of you intend leaving the place some time, don't you?"

"Certainly," was the response.

"How many rounds of cartridges have you, all told, for your rifles and revolvers?"

"About eighty for our rifles, and a couple of hundred for the revolvers," said Frank.

"That's where the point is, exactly; all that I have left in the line of weapons and ammunition is this single revolver, with four chambers loaded. When all our cartridges are gone, what is to become of us then?"

"You're right, old fellow—you're right!" exclaimed Frank. "It would never do for us to hope to reach the coast without our firearms and the necessary ammunition."

"Hof course hit wouldn't," said the Englishman. "Hi'll tell my hold 'oman habout hit, hand she kin 'ave 'er choice hof stayin' 'ere or goin' halong."

"Yes; and maybe you can get Alare to agree to accompany you," ventured Sam, addressing Frank.

"No," returned his friend, sadly shaking his head; "no woman or girl could live to reach the coast. They would die before we could make half the distance."

"You have my opinion on it, anyway," remarked Sam. "If we stay here, and waste all our cartridges in fighting down this rebellion of Hanga's, we must expect to stay here till we die."

"I never looked at it in that way before, Sam," said Frank. "We must certainly do as you say, and it will never do to let the queen know of our intentions. No! We must sneak away like a thief in the night. It don't seem right, but we must do it!"

The three had halted, and were standing on the brow of a hill, within a stone's throw of the palace, and Frank pointed in the direction of Hanga's headquarters.

"See," said he, "they are going to make another attack to-day; we must be careful of our shots."

He was right.

Hanga was going to make another attack, and that at once.

Already he had his forces into line, and presently he started again for the battle ground.

"When shall we leave?" asked Sam, as they hurried to make preparations for the attack.

"We must leave to-night, if we hope to leave at all," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE REBELS' VICTORY.

While the latter part of the conversation between our friends was taking place, the figure of a girl had been crouching behind a clump of bushes, drinking in every word.

It was Alare; she arose to her feet as the trio left, and blindly grasped the limbs of a neighboring tree for support.

Her face was as pale as a snowdrift, and her bosom heaved convulsively.

She was only a child, but her love was pure and simple, and who would dare to say that it would not prove lasting?

The young stranger from a far-away land had returned the affection shown by her—at least, she had had reason to believe that he did—and now he was going away to leave the Laking country—and her.

The thought was a horrible one to the poor girl, and at length she became overcome to such an extent that she uttered a cry of anguish and sank to the ground in a swoon.

But only for a few moments did she remain in that state; then she arose to her feet, with an expression of resignation upon her face.

Her better judgment told her that Frank was right when he said: "We must leave to-night!" Why should he not desire to

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return to his own country? It was far superior to the land of the Lakings; and, besides, his friends and former associates dwelt there. Yes, he must go, and she would aid him, too.

With this determination in view, Alare set out for the royal palace by a roundabout way.

When she arrived there, Frank, Sam and Oliver were already in the presence of her mother.

Hanga and his followers were on their way to meet them, and Frank was telling the anxious queen that he hoped to break up the rebellion in this conflict.

Alare hoped he would, for he might stay longer with them, then.

But her heart told her that it was not to be so, and she was resigned to the inevitable.

Frank pressed her hand as he left the palace, and she noticed that there were tears in his eyes as he did so.

Swallowing the lump that arose in her throat, she put on an air of indifference, and bade him do his best and defeat Hanga, if possible.

A few minutes more, and our three friends were leading the solare's followers to meet their foes.

This time Frank had his forces divided into four companies—one to meet the attack, one for reserve and the other two to flank the enemy on their right and left.

His men seemed to be determined and eager for the fray, and Frank felt that, if Hanga could be slain on the start, victory would surely be on his side.

At length the rebel leader halted his men at the edge of the square and prepared for the charge.

Frank was ready to meet him, and the next instant the rush started.

The two opposing parties met in nearly the same spot they had in the first charge of the previous conflict, and it was altogether much the same.

Frank used his shots very sparingly, and did his best to down Hanga.

But the wily scoundrel evidently seemed aware of his intention, for he kept himself well aloof from the range of the deadly rifle.

So persistent were the rebels that they did not fall back an inch, but, on the contrary, kept on advancing.

Ten minutes of this sort of work, during which large numbers on either side fell to rise no more, and Frank's followers began to waver.

Just as they broke, he sent out the signal that had been agreed upon, and the reserve, under the command of Sam Singleby, came up, while Oliver Looney and Zex led the other two companies to flank the rebels on either side.

Sam had scarcely joined in the fray before Hanga's reserve dashed up, and then it was that some fighting was done.

But it could not last.

The boys were very sparing with their shots, and the superior numbers of the enemy seemed bound to win.

Back, inch by inch, Frank and Sam were driven, until they felt that if Oliver and Zex did not arrive soon, they would have to fly to the hills back of the palace and form a breastworks.

But even as they were about to turn their horses' heads and sound the retreat, the two companies dashed up.

Hanga was evidently up to this maneuver, for the rear division of his men, under his own lead, met Zex with a fearful rush, and in five minutes' time put him to flight.

Oliver was more successful, however, as he succeeded in cutting a veritable pathway through the thickest of the rebels.

Thus the fight went on for half an hour, Hanga's men fighting with dogged determination that was remarkable.

How it was they hardly knew, but presently Frank, Sam and the Englishman found themselves in a heap in the midst of the now frenzied fighters.

Zex had fallen, and this fact had a demoralizing effect on the loyal Lakings.

Our three friends were mounted on good horses, and in the midst of the howling enemy, as they were, they concluded that it was high time that they sought for an avenue of escape.

They had expended about all the shots that they could well afford, and now, as they had done their best, there was nothing left for them to do but to retire as gracefully as possible.

It was with a feeling of reluctance that Frank gave the order to break through the surrounding horde and seek the safety of the hills.

"Keep together!" he shouted, "and use your revolvers! A couple of shots apiece will do the business."

He was right; two minutes more, and they were galloping from the spot, followed by the demoralized loyalists, who were now fleeing for their lives.

The battle was over.

For some reason best known to himself, Hanga did not pursue the defeated ones, but seemed satisfied with taking possession of the palace, where he declared himself king of the Laking country.

And the queen and Alare? They had also sought the shelter of the hills, and were surrounded by a knot of their followers when the boys rode up.

"Well?" asked her majesty, addressing Frank, with a woful look on her countenance.

"Your cause is lost," returned he, solemnly.

"Then I shall die with it!" and, drawing a small poniard from her dress, she plunged it in her bosom.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALARE'S TRAGIC DEATH.

The queen's action had been so sudden that for a moment those assembled about her did not fully comprehend what had taken place.

Frank was the first to make a move, and, rushing forward, he raised the woman's head from the ground.

She was still breathing, but the blood was flowing in a crimson stream from a wound in her breast, from which the hilt of the poniard still protruded.

A single glance told the boy that she was dying.

"Alare," said he, gazing at the girl tenderly, "your mother is dying. Speak to her, and see if she is conscious."

In another moment Alare had sunk to the side of the dying queen, her face as white as a ghost.

"Mother, mother! Don't die and leave me!" she cried, in her own tongue.

But there was no answer to her appeal; the poniard had done its work, and a moment more the defeated queen of the Laking Land was dead.

Alare fainted, and some of the court women carried her away from the spot.

Sam, who was a rather keen observer, had been watching some of the leaders of the defeated people, and it began to dawn upon him that he and his companions were looked upon with considerable distrust since the disastrous result of the battle.

He told Frank and Oliver of this as soon as he got the opportunity, and they all concluded that it was high time for them to leave.

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They hung about the foot of the mountains, where they had been driven by Hanga, until sunset, and then, seeing that their late friends were growing still colder toward them, they got ready to leave.

They still retained the horses they had ridden during the battle, and they concluded to leave, one at a time, on these, and meet at a certain point after dark.

But Frank desired to see Alare once more before he left the Laking Land, and he made up his mind that if in any way possible he would do so.

The place appointed to meet at was the royal burying grounds, and accordingly Sam at once set out, mounted on his horse, as if he were going to find out something about the enemy.

Sextupuaga, Oliver Looney's wife, had been killed in the mad rush to the hills for safety, and so there was now absolutely nothing to keep him back.

He started about fifteen minutes after Sam, going in a slightly different direction.

The Lakings did not appear to notice these departures in the least, but huddled themselves together in knots, and jabbered away, in their own peculiar language.

The Englishman and his steed were no sooner lost to view when another horse and rider left the place.

It was Alare.

Frank was agreeably surprised at this, and he at once joined her.

When they had placed themselves well beyond the hearing of the defeated Lakings, Frank swallowed the big lump that had risen in his throat, and took the beautiful girl's hand.

"Alare," began he, "I am going away."

"Yes, I know," she returned, sadly.

"You know! how?"

"I overheard your conversation with your two friends this morning."

"You would not have me stay, would you?"

"No, it is best that you should go. My people are setting themselves against you. They say that if you had not come here there would have been no war. Go, and my blessings will go with you. Only"—and a tear dimmed her eye—"think of me sometimes, when you reach your own land. Think of Alare, who, though but a girl, loved you with the simple love of a woman of her own race. I shall not live to see anything further of the ruin that has been brought upon us by Hanga, for something in my heart tells me that I will never see another sunrise. We must say good-by now; think of me in after years, is all that I ask."

"But," said Frank, who was now nearly blinded with the tears that came into his eyes, "I can't leave you this way, Alare; come along with me, and I will take you to my own country."

"It cannot be; if I desired to go with you ever so much—and you know that I do—I could not live to cross the mountains. It is cold at their tops, and my people cannot live ten minutes where the climate is at the freezing point. Thus it is that our race is kept in this one place, surrounded on all sides by towering mountains, whose cold, white tops mean certain death to any who might be rash enough to venture there."

The girl's words fell upon Frank's ears with such a blinding force that he felt a cold shiver run down his back.

He now realized only too well that all thought of taking her with him, to brave the dangers of reaching civilization, were utterly useless.

Still he could not bear the parting that had to take place within a few minutes.

Taking a package from her bosom, Alare handed it to him, saying:

"Here, take this and divide its contents among your two friends and yourself. It contains a hundred of the glistening stones you deem so precious. Take this also, and keep it for my sake. Don't open it until you arrive at your own home."

Mechanically the boy took what she offered him and placed them in his breast pocket.

The first was a good-sized package, and the second was a small bit of light material wrapped in a piece of gay-colored, silk-like wrapping.

"Now, one thing more before we part forever," said Alare. "I suppose you are to meet your two friends at the royal burial grounds? If you are, don't touch any of the gold or diamonds there; there is enough riches in the package I just gave you. Will you promise me this?"

"I will!" exclaimed Frank, hoarsely.

"Then, good-by."

She took his hand and held it tightly in her own for a moment. Just at that instant there was a rush of many feet, and turning, the two parting ones beheld Hanga and a score of his followers directly upon them.

"Ha!" exclaimed Hanga. "Dog of a stranger, I have found you. Die!"

With all the power he could command the Laking rebel hurled his short spear at Frank's breast.

There was a wild scream, and Alare threw herself across the neck of the boy's steed and saved his life.

Yes, she saved his life at the cost of her own.

The quivering spear pierced her delicate, shapely back just below the left shoulder blade, and its sharpened point found a resting place in her heart.

She threw her arms about the neck of Frank in one short embrace, and then slipped to the ground—a corpse!

For the space of ten seconds not one of the lookers-on could move a muscle.

Even Hanga seemed to be dazed at the horror of the tragedy, and he grasped a sapling for support.

As Frank realized what had happened, a glassy look came into his eyes, and he felt as if he was falling from the back of his horse.

But only for a moment did he remain thus.

Then his eyes emitted a blaze of fury, and his revolver leaped to a line with Hanga's heart.

Crack!

The weapon spoke, and its report echoed the death knell of the villain.

But the boy did not feel satisfied; before the Laking's body reached the ground all the chambers in his revolver found a lodgment in his carcass.

The rebels, who stood gazing upon the scene, had dropped their weapons to the ground, and the looks of horror upon their faces showed that they had completely lost their senses for the time being.

Without noticing him in the least, Frank slid to the ground, and after imprinting a reverent kiss upon the lips of the dead girl, sprung upon his horse's back, and dashed away like the wind toward the spot where he was to meet Sam and Oliver.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FAREWELL TO LAKING LAND.

Frank Lowe proceeded on his way unmolested, until at length he arrived at the burial grounds, where he was to meet Sam and Oliver.

The two were already there waiting his coming, and as he drew rein before them they greeted him with a joyful shout of welcome.

"Have you broken open any of the jars of diamonds yet?" were Frank's first words.

"No," returned Sam; "we thought we would wait until you arrived.

"Then don't touch one of them. Come! we must be off at once."

"Why, hain't ve goin' ter take hany riches haway vith hus?" asked Oliver, in surprise.

"Yes; I have enough for all of us in my breast pocket. It might seem strange to you both in my telling you not to touch anything here; but I promised one who is now dead that we would not."

Sam did not ask a single question; a look in the face of his friend told him that it was not good policy to do so now.

Silently he vaulted upon the back of his horse, his action being followed at once by the Englishman.

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"I don't believe we shall be able to cross the mountains at the point we came over," said Frank, as he led the way from the spot.

"Why not?" asked Sam.

"Because Hanga has been killed, and I expect the entire Laking population are on the watch for us at this moment; they will naturally guard the place we came over, thinking we will return the same way."

"You are right, old fellow. You said Hanga had been killed—who was so kind as to rid the world of the scoundrel?"

"It was I who did the deed; he came upon me on the mountain side and hurled his spear at me, with the intention of cutting short my earthly career; but Alare, poor girl, sprang forward to shield me and received the weapon in her back."

"And she is—"

"Dead!" replied Frank, in a hollow voice.

"That is ther wust news Hi 'ave heard since Hi 'ave been hin this beastly country," remarked Oliver.

But Frank did not notice his words; he was growing excited in the recital of what had occurred, and he went on:

"Yes, she died in saving my life, and Hanga was her murderer. But I avenged her almost immediately; I shot the scoundrel in his tracks as if he were a rabid dog; then I fled from the spot like the wind. Here I am; now what course shall we take?"

"Make for the nearest point where the mountains bound this land," replied Sam, who sympathized deeply in his heart at his friend's sorrow over the death of Alare.

"All right, then; we may as well continue on the course we are going. It is away from the Laking village, and, if I judge rightly, the mountains are not far from here."

The horses they rode were good ones, and where the traveling was good they got very quickly over the ground.

Just as morning dawned, they arrived at the foot of the mountains at a point where Sam thought he recognized.

It soon struck him that he was near the canyon where he had shot Jaques Lecairo in the gas cave.

He quickly informed his companions of this fact.

"Did you explore the canyon to see where it led to?" asked Frank.

"No, I did not; I was too anxious to get back to you."

"Can we get to it with our horses?"

"Yes; I am sure we can."

"Lead the way, then. It may be the means of getting us out of this valley."

Sam wondered what his friend meant by thinking of getting away from the place by seeking the canyon when he well knew that there were mountains to cross.

But he did not say anything, and led the way to a good place to enter the narrow cut.

In a few minutes they had made the descent, and then Frank came to a halt.

"Now for breakfast," said Frank, "and then we will see where this canyon leads to. It either stops at the face of that steep mountain over there, or else it goes on through."

Sam now began to open his eyes.

"Yes," returned he; "I never thought of that. See, the water in the stream runs that way. Who can tell but it does go on through?"

Oliver had walked off while the two boys were conversing, and presently the report of his rifle rang out.

A few minutes later he appeared, dragging a goat of the same species Sam had shot on his former visit to the place.

This served to make them an excellent breakfast, and then, cutting off the best parts of the meat, they gave their horses a drink and started to follow the stream down the canyon.

In about half an hour they came to what seemed to be the end of it; but a second glance showed them that it proceeded on through the mountain, just as Frank had anticipated.

It was an irregular tunnel, about fifteen feet wide by twelve feet high, and, as far as they could see, was as dark as the grave.

After a brief resting spell, during which the horses were allowed to nibble upon the short grass that grew on the sides of the canyon, they boldly entered the mouth of the tunnel.

The farther they went the more sure they were that it passed completely through to the other side.

In many places it was barely wide enough for them to proceed, while in others it was large enough for a company of soldiers to pass through.

It was very dark in the tunnel, but as the stream flowed on through the center of it they knew that if there were any holes or

pitfalls ahead of them, they would become aware of it by hearing the water as it rushed over.

At length, after what seemed to be many hours, they detected a faint glimmer of light ahead of them.

With a feeling of joy they shook each other by the hand, and then pushed on the tired horses as fast as they could travel over the rough ground.

Fifteen minutes more and they had passed through the tunnel and reached a canyon similar to the one by which they had entered.

They found that it was past sunset, and considering the fact that night was upon them, they concluded to camp where they were for the night.

Tethering their tired steeds near a patch of mountain grass, they ate some of the goat-meat and then went to sleep.

They were up and stirring when day broke and once more started on their way.

In a couple of hours they reached the level country once more, leaving the Laking country far behind them on the other side of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Just six weeks from the time our three friends emerged from the mouth of the canyon, after penetrating the mountains, we find them safely in Bagamayo.

They had fallen in with an exploring party and reached the seaboard in safety.

Oliver Looney's horse had died from the effects of a snake bite, but Frank and Sam retained theirs.

They concluded to take them home with them, as they were fine-looking animals, sturdy and strong and very swift travelers.

Frank divided the diamonds given him by Alare equally with his companions, and then they all knew that they had been well paid for their perilous visit to the land of the unknown race.

The sale of one of the largest of the precious stones brought in enough money to pay their passage to London.

Here Oliver Looney concluded to remain, saying that when he had obtained a fair education he would come over to the United States and pay them a visit.

Frank Lowe and Sam Singleby took passage on board a fast steamer, and arrived in New York just one year from the time they had left it.

Of course, the first place they visited was their old home Mottfield.

Here a surprise awaited them.

They found that Sam's stepmother had died from the bursting of a blood vessel in a violent fit of anger a month previous, and also that his father was just about to be turned from his farm on account of a pending foreclosure.

It is needless to say that the two boys were warmly welcomed by Farmer Singleby.

The man wept genuine tears of joy.

His son and Frank, whom he thought nearly as much of, had come back, and they were rich! Think of it—rich!

His farm was saved, and now he need never work so hard again!

Frank Lowe has not forgotten the beautiful Alare yet, nor never will as long as he lives.

Sometimes he unlocks a drawer and produces a lock of hair, as black as a raven's wing and as fine as silk. The tears glisten in his eyes. It is poor Alare's last keepsake, which he will cherish forever.

One thing both Frank and Sam positively declare, and that is that they will never attempt to pay a second visit to the land of the Unknown Race.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 15, will contain "Bert Breezeway; or, The Boy Who Joined a Circus," by Barry Tallyho.

Bert was the "bad boy" in the school he attended. Nothing really bad about him, but he was mischievous, and set the whole school topsy-turvy. Afterward he became the star performer in a big circus, and during all this time things were happening in quick order.

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